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Price 5 Cents.

THE TWO SCHOOLS AT OAK DALE • OR • THE RIVAL STUDENTS OF CORRINA LAKE. BY ALLYN DRAPER



Mexican Madge led, with Black Kanuck close on top of her, and at least three of the ponies within half a length of the goal. "Hip, hip! Three cheers for Bob Fuller!" roared the Academy fellows "Bully boy, Bob! Go in! You've got 'em."

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The Two Schools at Oakdale ;

OR,

THE RIVAL STUDENTS OF CORRINA LAKE.

BY ALLYN DRAPER.

CHAPTER I.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

"Help! Stop her! Stop her! Help! A hundred dollars if you'll stop that boat!"

Now a hundred dollars was a great deal of money to Larry White, whose father was nothing but an ordinary operative in the Oakdale Hosiery Co.'s factory, one of the most flourishing of the many enterprises on the banks of Lake Corrina, and very naturally he looked around.

"Help! Stop her, Larry! Stop her! Look alive there, boy, and head her off, or Bob and I will be left on this infernal island all night as sure as fate."

The last part of Colonel Fuller's remark was a manifest absurdity.

It would have been just as easy a matter for Larry White to pull his old leaky skiff to Bark Island to the rescue of Colonel Fuller, the rich man of Oakdale, and "Count Robert"—so certain light-minded boys were wont to style him—his son, as it would be for him to give chase to the Sphinx.

But the colonel was excited and had evidently lost his head, and no wonder, since the rain was coming down in tubfuls, the lightning playing around the trees beneath which he stood, and the thunder crashing and rolling all about him as though everything were doomed to eternal smash.

"Can't you head her off, Larry?" bawled Colonel Fuller, grasping a tree with his left hand, and making an improvised speaking-trumpet with his right. "She'll drift round into Beaver-tail channel just as sure as fate. Once she strikes the rocks on Cram's Island she's gone."

"You're mistaken, father," said Bob Fuller, his eye fixed on the drifting steam launch; "the Sphinx is heading in a direction which will take her around Cram's Island; you don't make any allowance for the wind."

"Yes, I do."

"I tell you you are mistaken. There! Wasn't I right? She

has passed the entrance to Beaver-tail channel now, and—by George! Larry's got a grip on her as sure's you're born!"

"And this stupid fishing excursion has cost me a hundred dollars," sighed Colonel Fuller; "but I suppose you'll say it's all my fault, Bob."

"I don't see what else I can say, father. I told you that sapling would never hold when you made the Sphinx fast."

"Well, you were right. I have found it out to my cost. Gather up the traps, Bob, we're sure to catch our death o' cold. The very instant Larry gets the launch here we must board her and make for home."

Bob Fuller obeyed.

Poles and lines, provision baskets, etc., were soon brought together on the little point where his father stood waiting for the captured Sphinx.

"It would be a bad job if I happened to get sick from this," growled the colonel. "You know we open school on Monday, Bob, and it wouldn't look right if I were not present to address the pupils of the Oakdale Academy at the commencement of the fall term. Dana will make a great to-do over his old commencement, you may rest assured, and 'twouldn't be the thing for us to be behind."

"Oh, you won't get sick. A little wetting won't hurt you," replied Bob, with his eye fixed on the boat.

"I don't know about that. I'm not as young as you are."

"Don't think you are going to take cold, father, and maybe you won't."

"That's all very well. Talk is cheap."

"Cheap or not, here's Larry. The Sphinx is safe. Three cheers for Larry White!"

Even as Bob Fuller spoke, the skiff with the steam launch in tow grated upon the sandy beach at a little distance from the point.

Colonel Fuller and his son hurried to the spot.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Larry," exclaimed the great man of Oakdale, grasping a manly, well-built, but poorly-dressed youth, who stepped from the skiff, warmly by the hand. "It was a lucky thing for us that you happened to

be on the lake, and luckier still that I spied you just when I did."

"I came out for a day's fishing, Colonel Fuller. The sudden storm spoiled my sport, and I was making for the lee of Bark Island when I heard you call."

"You didn't see the Sphinx, then?"

"No; I doubt if I should have seen her if you hadn't called."

"Well, it's all right now. Can you manage to get up steam, Larry? You understand the running of the engine just as well as Bob, who is almost frozen——"

"Nonsense, father! I am all right!" cried Bob, leaping into the launch, which he had drawn in shore. "But you can help me if you will, Larry. Here, make the skiff fast to the stern. You shall go back to Oakdale with us in the launch."

"I'll give you my check for one hundred dollars, Larry, as soon as we reach Oakdale," said the colonel loftily, as he began putting the poles and baskets on board the Sphinx.

"I can't accept it, Colonel Fuller," answered the boy, blushing. "What I did was nothing more than I would have done for any one."

"That makes no difference, Larry. A promise is a promise. You'll have to take the check, for I always keep my word."

"I can't do it, colonel."

"Why not? You are poor and——"

"And proud, Colonel Fuller," said the boy, as he leaped on board the launch.

Colonel Fuller muttered something which Larry White failed to catch.

One word he did hear, however, and that was "fool."

It made him resolve more firmly than ever not to accept the check.

In this he was wise.

He had no wish to put himself under obligations to Colonel Fuller. He could not have done so without an entire sacrifice of his self-respect.

The steam launch was but a cheap affair, a mere toy, furnished with a little engine in which steam could be generated in a very short space of time.

It was used by the students of the Oakdale Academy, and had been considered a "big thing" until General Dana built the Minnie on the opposite side of the lake.

Now Colonel Fuller and General Dana were bitter rivals.

Both were rich and practically retired from business. The latter was the leading citizen of the village of Hamden, on the west shore of Lake Corrina; the former carried Oakdale "in his breeches pocket," at least so every one said.

They had been rivals in the army and rivals in business; and now, in the days of their retirement, instead of burying the hatchet as sensible men should have done, the two local magnates waged war on each other more bitterly than ever before.

Now in reality there was no such place as Hamden.

The lake was not over two miles in width at its widest, and it cut Oakdale township into two parts, with Downingtown at the head of its upper division, and Peterboro' at the foot of the lower half, as will be explained more particularly later on.

General Dana was an old resident of that part of the town known as West Oakdale, which was situated, as would naturally be supposed, upon the westerly shore of the lake. Colonel Fuller's advent at Oakdale proper, on the contrary, was a matter of later date.

When the colonel settled in the town he discovered that the only good school in the vicinity was the Hamden Institute at West Oakdale, owned and controlled by his enemy.

It was a most excellent educational institution, and in a highly flourishing condition.

All this, however, made no difference to the colonel.

He would have preferred to have his son grow up in ignorance than to acquire an education alongside of Joe Dana, "that man Dana's brat," as he styled the boy.

As a natural outcome of all this bitterness of feeling, the Oakdale Academy sprang into existence.

Colonel Fuller's money built it, and Colonel Fuller's money supported it. In time the Academy grew to something like the proportions of its elder rival and supported itself.

Now this move did not suit the general at all.

In the first place, the Oakdale Academy not only managed to draw away several of his best paying pupils, but it had likewise appropriated to itself the name of the town.

To change the name of the Hamden Institute—it was so called in honor of its original founder, from whom General Dana had purchased it—to the West Oakdale Institute would not in any sense of the word have filled the bill.

As a consequence, when the general found that the mouse could not come to the mountain, he strove to force the mountain to come to the mouse, and petitioned to the selectmen to have West Oakdale created the township of Hamden and set apart as a community by itself.

In this he failed ignominiously.

All Oakdale had a vote on the question, and the colonel managed to control more votes than himself.

Nevertheless the people on the west side of the lake began to call their locality Hamden, and in process of time the name became generally adopted, in spite of all Colonel Fuller could do to prevent it.

The rival schools were, as a matter of fact, both in the township of Oakdale.

That there was war to the knife between them it is entirely unnecessary to state.

To Larry White and such other of the poorer boys of the towns of Hamden and Oakdale, whose parents could afford to send them to neither the institute nor the academy, all this was very amusing.

So far Larry had managed to keep on excellent terms with both Bob Fuller and Joe Dana.

To have put himself under pecuniary obligations to Colonel Fuller would have destroyed his independent position at once.

"Steam's up, father," called Bob Fuller from the launch at last.

"Then make for home as soon as possible," replied the colonel, as he stepped aboard the Sphinx. "Larry, you take the wheel. Be careful, now, in going through Crooked Pass. I wouldn't have another accident happen for the world."

Now, Lake Corrina, as every one who knows the region at all is fully aware, is divided into two parts, resembling as much the shape of the two bulbs of a huge hour-glass as anything else, with a narrow connecting space between.

This was Crooked Pass, a tortuous channel filled with rocks and islands, and highly dangerous to one not acquainted with its windings, which connected the upper and lower lakes.

Both Hamden and Oakdale proper were situated on the lower lake.

Since it was all one sheet of water it seemed strange that good fishing should be confined to the upper lake; yet such was the case, and the fishing around Bark Island was the best of all.

The rain had ceased and the storm clouds were drifting rapidly to the eastward.

When the Sphinx rounded Pote's Point, on the Hamden side of the lake, the setting sun burst forth.

The Sphinx was in the act of shooting across to the easterly side of Crooked Pass, where the deepest water was to be had, when an exclamation from Colonel Fuller, who sat at the bow, suddenly drew the attention of Larry and Bob.

"Look out! There's the Minnie!"

The colonel spoke none too soon.

The words had scarcely escaped his lips when a second steam launch, in every way the superior of the Sphinx, came shooting

suddenly around the end of a wooded island which divided the channel, heading directly across the path of the Sphinx.

It required no telescope for Colonel Fuller to see that the launch contained his rival, General Dana, and a merry party bound for the upper lake.

"Heavens! he'll cut us in two!" roared the colonel. "Stop the engine, Bob! Back her! Larry, shake off to the starboard! No use—it's all up with us!"

And so it was, at least so far as the Sphinx was concerned.

The launch had acquired altogether too much headway to escape the threatened danger.

Almost before Bob and Larry understood what was going on the prow of the Minnie struck the Sphinx amidships with tremendous force, cutting her in two like a knife.

Before Colonel Fuller had time to recover from his astonishment he found himself floundering in the lake.

CHAPTER II.

LARRY'S LUCK IN CROOKED PASS

"Back water! Back water! Stop her!" came the shout from the Minnie in the voice of General Dana. "Here's a nice mess! Why didn't you look where you were going, Joe?"

"Much as I can do to run the engine," retorted Joe Dana, aghast at the ruin the Minnie had wrought.

And well he might be.

The Sphinx had already sunk to the bottom of the shallow channel, Larry's boat only remaining afloat, toward which Colonel Fuller, Bob, and Larry were swimming for all they were worth.

On board the Minnie the ladies and gentlemen of the party all crowded over on the side nearest the wreck.

Now there might have been no danger in this had it not happened that Joe Dana, in obeying the command to back water, managed to crowd the stern of the launch against one of the great bowlders with which the channel was filled.

This was more carelessness.

There was a tremendous shock; the launch yawed over to the left.

"Help! H-e-l-p!"

Amid the shrieks of the ladies there broke one cry louder than all the rest.

Miss Minnie Dana, who had incautiously leaned too far over the rail, was seen to lose her equilibrium and topple over into the lake.

"God help me! My daughter! My daughter!" gasped the general. "She's overboard, and neither Joe nor I can swim a stroke!"

There were only two other gentlemen among the party—both dudish-looking fellows—neither of whom showed the slightest disposition to imperil their lives.

"It's all that confounded Sphinx!" cried the general. "I'll make Fuller pay for this. What business had he to cross my path?"

And the agonized father, despite his inability to swim, would have leaped into the lake had not Joe seized him by the coat-tails and held him back.

"It's all right, father. See—Minnie is safe! Larry White can swim like a duck. He has caught her in his arms!"

It was just as Joe Dana had said.

Though it has taken some space to describe the accident in Crooked Pass, the time occupied by all these happenings was actually less than three minutes, all told.

When Colonel Fuller went into the lake Bob and Larry were with him.

The Sphinx was sinking, and there was no other course to pursue.

Fortunately, all three could swim, and the colonel and his son were making for Larry's boat when its owner saw Miss Minnie Dana go over the rail of the launch which bore her name.

It was an exciting moment for Larry White.

To be sure there was but little danger; but then Larry was less than twenty and Miss Minnie just sixteen.

For a long time Larry, in common with half the poorer boys in Oakdale and Hamden, had admired the young girl at a distance.

To speak to her, to hold her in his arms with that golden head resting on his shoulder, and those great blue eyes turned pleadingly upward toward his own, well, that was—bliss, shall we say bliss? Pshaw! The word is too tame; but as we have no other which will begin to express the feelings of Larry White when he transferred the light form of Minnie Dana to the arms of her anxious father, we will have to choose between bliss or nothing—it's one of the two.

"Larry White, you shall be well paid for this."

Larry was disgusted.

He had accepted the hand of Joe Dana stretched forth to pull him on board the launch, and now as the dripping form of Miss Minnie was turned over to the care of her female companions, these were the first words her father said.

"I don't want any pay for doing my duty, sir," he replied, flushing proudly.

"But you shall be paid—I insist upon it. I——"

"Father, how can you?"

It was Minnie Dana herself who spoke:

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. White," she added, as Larry blushed the redder. "You have saved my life, and I shall never forget it. I should certainly have drowned but for your help."

"I'm not so certain of that, Minnie," blustered the general. "To be sure, I'm not much of a swimmer, but I should have gone over after you——"

"Yes, and have been drowned yourself," interrupted Joe most unfilially. "What's the use talking, pop? If you or I had gone over Larry would have had to save us both."

"Joseph! Hold your tongue, sir! I shall enter into no unseemly discussion. About ship at once. Start the engine. We are going home."

"If you please, sir, I should like to go aboard my boat," said Larry, meekly.

"What? Join that old scoundrel Fuller and his whelp of a son! By no means. I shall pay for the damage I have caused, and as for your boat, Larry White, you shall have a new one, and a thousand dollars besides."

"I can't accept it, sir. My boat is good enough for me."

"There will be no option. Ha! What are you going to do?"

"To jump overboard and swim to my boat, since there seems no other way," laughed Larry, to whom the feat was nothing.

And before General Dana had opportunity to speak a word the boy had leaped into the lake and was striking out for the skiff.

He was on board in less than two minutes.

Colonel Fuller, who possessed sufficient dignity to keep quiet and avoid a quarrel with his rival in public, had been a silent witness to the whole affair.

"You did well, Larry," he said, as the boy scrambled into the skiff. "Had it been Dana himself I should have said let him drown, but a lady is another part of speech."

"Hush!" whispered Bob. "Dana is calling you, father."

"Pull up the launch, Larry," said the colonel, gritting his teeth. "I'm curious to hear what the old beast has to say for himself."

"Colonel Fuller, I have accidentally destroyed your steam launch," were the first words of the Hamden magnate, as the skiff came abreast the Minnie.

"Well, sir, I presume you will have to abide by the conse-

quences," answered the rich man of Oakdale, striving to control his temper as best he could.

"Do you mean to intimate that I ran into your old tub on purpose, sir?"

"Wouldn't like to say. You'll pay for it, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. I shall pay for it. The Minnie is yours, sir. I make you a present of her. If you will allow me the privilege of using her long enough to convey my daughter to her home, whose accident is the direct result of your careless handling of the Sphinx, I shall deliver the launch at the pier in front of your school-house by ten o'clock to-night."

The general would not have called the Oakdale Academy by its proper title—no, not if it would have prevented his falling dead on the spot.

"Why, you impudent old scoundrel!" roared the colonel. "How dare you address me after that fashion? First you sink my boat, and then you accuse me of trying to drown your daughter! I take your boat! Never. But for the presence of ladies I'd board her and take satisfaction out of your hide!"

"Pull, Larry, pull!" whispered Bob Fuller. "There's going to be a fight presently. Pull for your life!"

"Dare to pull this boat, Larry White, and I'll knock you overboard!" bellowed the colonel, who had now lost his temper completely. "Pull to the Minnie—that's where you'll pull! I propose to have an understanding about this matter at once."

"Come on board the Minnie, Larry!" shouted the general. "I'll see that you are protected from the machinations of that man!"

"He'll do nothing of the sort, sir. He saved my life and that of my son, and I propose to reward the young man suitably after I've settled with you."

"He saved the life of my daughter, and perhaps my own!" screamed the general, "and I propose to reward the young man liberally—liberally, you understand—not suitably, as a person of your mean spirit would do—after I've delivered up the Minnie to you, in payment for that old tub, the Sphinx."

"You shall pay for this, General Dana!"

"I'll make it hot for you, Colonel Fuller!"

They were still shaking their fists at each other, shouting and screaming in a most disreputable manner, when the Minnie steamed away.

CHAPTER III.

MEXICAN MADGE MEETS WITH A MISHAP.

"Hurrah! Three cheers and a tiger for Bob Fuller! Mexican Madge has won again!"

And six ponies, mounted by as many boys, in jockey caps and riding costumes, passed beneath a wire stretched from a tree to a pole planted in front of an improvised judges' stand, a gay tent of broad red and white stripes, from which floated a pennant bearing the letter O in red upon yellow ground.

"Hip—hip! Rah! Rah! Rah! Tiger!" yelled the boys gathered about the tent again, as Bob Fuller vaulted lightly from the back of a beautiful black pony, of the pure broncho breed, which had passed under the wire less than a hand's length ahead of a brown Canadian, ridden by Ben Spurr.

"How is it, Larry? Who's ahead?" demanded the latter, as the boys gathered about the tent beneath which sat Larry White enacting the role of judge.

"Why, Bob, of course," replied Larry. "It's no use pretending you don't know, Ben. Of course Mexican Madge was ahead."

"You must be crazy!"

"Not a doubt about it."

"Better give it up, Ben!"

This from a dozen boys.

It was the second week in the school term at the Oakdale Academy; and, it may be mentioned, the second since the opening of the Hamden Institute as well.

Colonel Fuller, who delighted in springing surprises of a pleasant character upon the students of the academy, had, during the vacation, purchased six superb little ponies, some of Mexican, others of Canadian breed, to be at the absolute disposal of the boys.

It was a happy thought.

Nothing could possibly have proved more acceptable.

The only trouble was the roll of the Oakdale Academy showed a membership of some eighty students, and it was pretty hard to make six ponies go round.

Boys, however, have their own way of settling such difficulties.

In this instance it was decided by drawing buttons from a box who should ride the ponies on Saturday afternoon. White buttons were a blank, black ones, of which there were five, gave a pony, while a solitary button brought to the lucky youth who drew it from the box the privilege of riding the favorite—Mexican Madge.

Away up on the east shore of Lake Corrina there was a broad level stretch, which seemed strangely out of place in a region of hills and valleys.

It was called the "Five Mile Reach," and was but a short distance from Downingtown, an important place at the head of the lake.

It is here that we find the boys of the Oakdale Academy on this particular September Saturday.

Such as had drawn ponies rode them. Others came in wagons, others still in boats.

There were at least forty boys assembled, and lots were cast in the manner described for the possession of the ponies for each particular race.

"I say, I was in first," persisted Ben Spurr, with his usual obstinacy. "Larry White isn't fit to be judge. He's nothing but a charity scholar, anyhow. Colonel Fuller only took him into the academy on account of that little affair on the lake."

"Shame on you, Ben!" cried a dozen voices.

"Don't you know better than to talk like that?" spoke up Ed Topliffe. "Larry could have gone to the Hamden Institute just as easily as to the Oakdale Academy. General Dana offered him free tuition for his bravery in saving his daughter's life, but he chose the academy, and he shan't be insulted by our boys while I'm around."

Meanwhile Larry, with a proud flush mounting his cheeks, had arisen and walked out of the tent.

"Don't mind him, Larry," said Bob, justly indignant. "I'd punch his head if I were you."

"No, I shan't do that. He has told the truth. I am nothing but a charity scholar, and ought not to aspire to any position. But when he says my judgment's not fair, he lies—that's all."

"I'll make you eat those words, Larry White!"

"I'm ready for you at the proper time and place, Ben Spurr. I am not going to break up the racing to thrash satisfaction out of a fellow like you."

"Hey, fellows! Look there!" shouted Jack Goodwin, pointing off in the direction of Downingtown. "I'll be blest if there ain't the Danaites coming on ponies that knock ours out of sight!"

Now up to the time of which we write the rivalry between the students had not extended to absolute non-intercourse.

Ball games, tugs of war, cricket and foot races were often entered into between them, the laurels of victory resting sometimes with the academy, at others with the Institute, as the case might be.

How the events of this particular Saturday afternoon were destined to affect this state of things will soon be seen.

"Just like old Dana," cried Bob Fuller. "He's always tagging in my father's wake."

"That's all very fine for you to say," sneered Ben Spurr, "but I take notice old Dana has managed to raise ducats enough to buy twelve ponies, while we have only six."

During the next fifteen minutes there was a perfect babel of sounds about the tent.

All were ambitious to mount the ponies, and as the Danaites had as yet decided upon no system of ballot, much squabbling ensued.

"I'm going to ride Black Kanuck, that's flat," said Joe Dana, who was very much accustomed to having his own way.

"Then we won't any of us ride, I tell you that much," affirmed Tom Joslin, one of the leading Danaites, stoutly. "Why can't we draw lots as the Fullerites do?"

"That's the talk! Lots it is!" shouted the Danaites.

It was noticeable that those who had driven out to "Five Mile Reach" in the wagons were particularly loud in their shouts for lots.

"If I can't ride Black Kanuck I won't ride at all," snapped Joe Dana, obstinately.

But he was overruled and lots were drawn on both sides.

As luck would have it Bob Fuller drew the red button a second time, while Joe Dana—they were all using the Fullerites' box—drew a blank.

"Some one's going to pay for this," snarled the son of the rich man of Hamden. "If it hadn't been for your confounded button box, Bob Fuller, I'd have shown you what Black Kanuck could do."

"Show me next time, then," laughed Bob, in high good humor. "We are going to ride more than one race, I guess."

"There'll be no next time if I can't ride Black Kanuck," answered Joe, crossly, as he walked away.

Ben Spurr was also left out in the cold.

"Where's Larry? We want him for judge," said Bob, looking about the field.

But Larry was invisible.

Thorough search was made for him everywhere, but he could not be found.

At last Jack Goodwin consented to take his place, and the race began.

It was to be for a mile stretch, from a certain pine tree back on the Reach as near that distance as the boys could estimate, to the wire in front of the judge's tent.

As the number of the ponies was uneven as divided between the rival schools, three of those belonging to the institute were ridden by Fullerites, making the contestants nine and nine.

At a given signal the start was made.

The boys about the tent watched the result with bated breath.

It soon became evident that the victory lay between Tom Joslin, mounted on Black Kanuck, and Bob Fuller on Mexican Madge.

They took the lead from the start, and held it, too, and the nearer they approached the wire the more certain it became that one must win.

"Where's Joe? Why ain't he here to see this thing out?" questioned Hen Ricker, a prominent Danaite.

Then, for the first time, the institute boys noticed that their leader was not among their number.

Like Larry White, Joe Dana had mysteriously disappeared.

"Gone off in the sulks because he couldn't ride Black Kanuck," said George Moore, another Danaite. "Look, fellows, here they are! By gracious! that's what I call fine!"

On came the ponies, every nerve strained to the utmost. Heads forward, nostrils distended—the wire was just ahead.

Mexican Madge led by perhaps half a head, with Black Kanuck close on top of her, and at least three of the remaining ponies within half a length of the goal.

"Hip! Hip! Three cheers for Bob Fuller!" roared the academy fellows.

"Bully boy, Bob! Go in! You've got 'em! Hip! Hip! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Now there is no such thing as absolute certainty in anything appertaining to worldly affairs.

As certain as anything possibly could be seemed the certainty that Bob Fuller would win the race.

Yet he did not.

Three feet more would have done it.

With Bob still leading, the contesting ponies came abreast the judges' tent.

Then all at once the sharp report of a pistol rang through the air, and Bob was seen to pitch suddenly forward, while Mexican Madge sank in her tracks a few inches short of the goal.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BOY IN THE BOAT.

A shout of dismay went up from all the boys who had gathered about the tent at the fall of Mexican Madge.

Bob—Bob! Are you hurt, old man?" cried Jack Goodwin, springing to his side, regardless of the danger from the horses, which came flying under the wire.

In a moment's time half the boys, assembled had rushed across the track—Institute and Academy mingled for once.

"There is nothing the matter with me, fellows," cried Bob Fuller, leaping to his feet. "What happened to Mexican Madge I can't understand——"

"Can't understand!" cried a dozen voices. "Didn't you hear the shot?"

"Shot! What shot?"

"The shot that took Madge from under you, Bob," said Sam Gardner, seriously. "Whether it was aimed at you or not I wouldn't like to say. Anyhow, it has done for the horse."

It was as Sam Gardner had said.

The rattle of the horses' hoofs had prevented the sound from reaching Bob Fuller's ears.

There upon the track lay the unfortunate broncho with her head beneath the wire.

That the race had been hers when the death shot came was as certain as anything could possibly be.

"It was a mean, contemptible outrage, and I'll bet you what you like that Joe Dana did it," whispered Tom Joslin to Hen Ricker—both Institute boys, too.

"Just what I think, Tom, but I wouldn't like to say so."

"I ain't going to say so until I'm certain of it. But I can't help thinking. Joe went off mad because he couldn't ride Black Kanuck, and—— Hello, what's the row now?"

"There he goes, fellows! There he goes!" came the shout from further along among the trees.

There were cries of:

"After him, fellows! Down with the Danaites! Catch him and chuck him over the bluff!"

"There—what did I tell you?" whispered Tom Joslin. "Look alive, fellows! We must have a hand in there. It won't do to let them hurt Joe, no matter if he is a fool."

And the Institute boys dashed after the Academy fellows through the woods toward the high bluffs which skirt the shores of Lake Corrina all along the line of the "Five Mile Reach."

It was Ben Spurr who had raised the shout.

Bob, who was in advance of all his companions, or at least thought he was, came suddenly upon Ben hurrying on ahead of him among the trees.

No sooner did Ben perceive the boys than he ran the faster,

shouting: "There he goes! There he goes!" at the top of his lungs.

"There who goes?" demanded Bob, catching hold of him as the boys gathered breathlessly about Ben at the edge of the bluff.

"The fellow who shot Mexican Madge. I saw him run this way just as plain as I see you now."

"Well, he ain't here now!"

"So I see. I can't imagine where he went to. He was right ahead of me when I gave the call."

"It's mighty funny, then, that there's nothing to be seen of him now," remarked Ed Topcliffe, looking up and down the line of the bluff. "One can't get any further in this direction, unless he wants to jump into the lake a hundred feet below."

There was certainly no one to be seen, and no place where any one could have hidden, for right here on the top of the bluff the woods were wholly free from underbrush, and it would have been next to impossible to conceal oneself among the trees.

"Who was it, Ben? Did you see his face?" demanded Bob, looking up and down somewhat suspiciously.

"No, I didn't see his face."

"But do you know who it was? And, by the way, how came you here, anyhow? I'm certain you weren't ahead of me when we started from the track."

"Yes, I was, too. I started the instant I heard the shot fired."

"What? You were not on the other side of the track?"

"Yes, I was."

"I'm blest if I saw you, then, Ben Spurr," spoke up Tom Joslin stoutly. "Look out you stick to a straight story now, unless——"

"Here, here, fellows, there must be no fighting now," interposed Bob, coolly. "This is a serious business, and must be sifted to the bottom. Ben, once and for all, who was the fellow you saw?"

"Well, I wouldn't like to say. I didn't see his face, Bob."

"But you saw his back?"

"Yes. I was a little way in the woods when the shot was fired, if you want to know, and of course I started to run, and presently I saw the fellow running ahead of me. When I heard you coming I gave the shout—you can believe me or not, just as you please."

"Of course we believe you. But why don't you tell us who you think it was?"

"If you know it was Joe Dana, out with it!" exclaimed several of the Institute boys. "We are just as fair as you fellows are, and ain't going to stand anything like this."

"'Twasn't Joe Dana."

"Then who was it?" demanded Bob, growing more and more angry. "I tell you what it is, Ben Spurr, if you don't speak out soon I'll find means to make you, for——"

"Look—look!" cried Ben, suddenly pointing off on the lake at a point fully a quarter of a mile further along the line of the bluffs. "There's the fellow I saw now, just putting off in that boat. If you ain't blind you can see who it is as well I can tell you. You needn't look any further to find out who shot Mexican Madge."

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated.

It needed no second glance to disclose the identity of the boy in the boat.

It was Larry White!

And no wonder.

The cutting remark made by Ben Spurr was enough to have wounded any one of a sensitive nature—either boy or man.

It is true that Larry was poor, but he was not without a proper sense of pride.

"There is one thing certain," muttered the sensitive fellow, as he strode away into the woods, "I shan't take part in any more of their games from this time out. I'm going home in my boat."

Now Larry and his leaky skiff were inseparable companions.

He had come up to the "Five Mile Reach in the "Fox," as he called the boat, landing in a little cove under the bluffs, joining the boys on the track some time after the races began; and he now hurried through the woods till he reached a steep, water-worn path which led down to the shore of the lake.

It was at least a quarter of a mile from the race track to the beginning of this path, and most of the boys knew it.

Hence the accusation of Ben Spurr—we may as well tell it right here—was received with much incredulity, particularly by Bob, who was entirely familiar with the ground.

"It's all nonsense," he said, after the boys had shouted themselves hoarse trying to attract Larry's attention. "That's Larry in the boat fast enough, but he ain't the fellow to do a mean thing like this. He's gone off because you insulted him, Ben Spurr. Besides, he never could have got down to his boat in so short a space of time. Whoever you saw, it wasn't Larry White."

"Well, it looked like him, anyhow," persisted Ben, doggedly.

"Of course I ain't going to say it actually was Larry, since I didn't see his face."

But it ended the racing.

Meanwhile, Larry White, entirely unconscious of what was transpiring, had hurried down the bluff to his boat.

It was a lovely day.

The sun was shining brightly, and the surface of the lake was calm and placid.

Larry, who was passionately fond of swimming, knowing as he did that the water still remains warm well into the month of October, resolved to take a plunge before starting for home.

He accordingly walked along under the projecting rocks to a little cove where he had often swam, pulling off his clothes, rushed into the lake and indulged in a most refreshing bath.

Perhaps it was the water which served to soothe his ruffled feelings; perhaps finding himself alone his good judgment got the better of his temper.

At all events, when he began to dress at last, Larry was quite himself again.

"I was a fool to mind what Ben Spurr said, anyhow," he muttered, as he pulled on his trousers. "Bob's a good fellow, and so are most of the other boys. When a fellow has plenty of money to spend I suppose he puts on airs naturally, and——"

The current of the boy's reflections was suddenly interrupted by the sound of voices proceeding seemingly from just behind the place where he stood.

Larry turned abruptly, scarce able to credit the plain evidence of his senses.

Nor was this to be wondered at, since directly behind rose the rocky wall of the bluff, towering above him perpendicularly to the height of a hundred feet and more.

As he stood wonderingly listening, Larry remembered something which caused his wonderment to increase.

It was that the projecting ledge before which he stood had always been known as the "Talking Rock"—so named by the Indians many generations before.

This the boy had heard ever since he could remember,

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY OF THE TALKING ROCK

When Larry White walked away from the judge's tent, his feelings were deeply wounded.

though he had, of course, only laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

Just now, however, it did not seem quite so absurd.

There was some one talking—he could hear the sound of voices plainly.

That he felt for the instant somewhat startled will cause no surprise.

First one voice would speak, then another answer.

On Larry's ear it fell a confused jumble of sounds.

For several moments the boy stood motionless, listening.

"I wonder if I were to put my ear against the rock I could make out what they are saying?" he thought. "There must be some sort of a cave in behind there, though I never heard of it. I can't account for it in any other way."

"M—um—um—um—um," came the sound again, as though in reply to the unspoken thought.

Larry clapped his ear to the rock.

To his intense surprise, he discovered that although the sounds were still deep and muffled, there was now no difficulty in distinguishing words.

"Do you think you can arrange it?" was the first sentence which reached his ears.

"Yes. I am sure of it," came the answer in the same smothered tones. "I know all about an engine, and can fix it as slick as a whistle. All I want is to be certain of the dosh."

"That boat must never win the race."

"Nuther she shan't ef I am paid to hinder her—you can jest bet your sweet life on that."

"Well, I'll see that it's all right and m—um—um—um;"

The voice here became indistinct, falling off into the mumbling sound once more.

Then suddenly all was still.

For some seconds Larry White remained motionless, his ear glued to the Talking Rock.

Whoever the speakers were and wherever they had been, they had evidently taken their departure, for as the seconds passed the sounds were not heard again.

Now, however mysterious this conversation may seem to be to our readers, it offered no mystery to the mind of Larry White, and after anxiously waiting a moment or two, he sprang away from the Talking Rock, and, running forward on the shelving beach, took a hasty survey of the bluffs.

Not only was no one visible, but Larry, familiar as he was with every inch of the ground, knew perfectly well that there was no place any one could hide.

"By gracious, this thing means treachery if it means anything!" he muttered, as he hurried back to the spot where he had left his clothes. "I must see Colonel Fuller and let him know about it the very first thing."

He finished dressing with all possible haste, entered his boat and pulled away for Oakdale with all his strength.

CHAPTER VI.

LARRY TELLS HIS STORY.

It was half past seven o'clock when Larry timidly pulled the bell of the great mansion in which dwelt the magnate of Oakdale—pulled it for the second time, we should have stated, since his adventure at the Talking Rock.

Upon reaching Oakdale Larry, true to his resolve, had proceeded directly to Colonel Fuller's, learning to his disappointment that the proprietor of the Academy would not be home until seven o'clock.

As there seemed nothing for it but to wait, Larry went home himself and ate his supper, returning to the colonel's mansion later on, as we have seen.

Sure the kun's in now, Masther White," said Patrick, the

butler, "but he's jist after sitting down to his dinner. Walk into the library an' I'll tell him yer here."

"Hello, Larry! that you!" shouted Bob, from the top of the stairs. "Where in the name of common sense have you been? What do you mean by deserting your friends the way you deserted us this afternoon? Do you know what happened after you left?"

"No."

"Then come up here to my room and I'll tell you. I'm dressing for dinner, but you won't mind. Come right up."

Larry obeyed.

He found Bob standing before the glass in the act of brushing his hair.

"Perhaps you don't know that some scoundrel put a ball through Mexican Madge and killed her, and came almighty near killing me."

"Bob Fuller! But you can't mean it!"

"But I do, though, Larry," answered Bob, tossing the hair brush down upon the bureau; and he immediately related the whole affair.

Of course Larry was thunderstruck.

It needed but one glance into the boy's honest eyes to see that he was wholly innocent of the slightest knowledge of the dastardly deed which Ben Spurr would have fastened upon him.

"Bob," he exclaimed, his face red with indignation; "you don't believe for an instant that Ben Spurr actually saw me running through the woods?"

"Of course I don't, Larry. Now keep cool, and don't get your mad up. You've got a bad temper, and——"

"And I'll thrash Ben Spurr till he takes back what he said."

"No, you won't. Mind, now, he didn't actually say it was you. He said he thought so."

"He's no business to think."

"Why did you go away?"

"He called me a beggar, and I was mad."

"That was contemptible, but calling you a beggar don't make you one."

"That's so. Perhaps I was too hasty. Now look here, Bob, I can account for every instant of my time, and I'm going to do it."

"Nonsense, Larry. I don't want to hear anything of the sort. I never believed for an instant that you fired that shot—neither do any of the other fellows. It was some tramp, most likely——"

"But you must hear me," interrupted Larry, earnestly. "I've got something very important to tell; that's what brought me up to see your father. Some one is plotting to play tricks with the Comet and make our fellows lose the race."

"Larry, you can't mean it?"

"But, I do, though."

"Joe Dana?"

"I can't tell you. Hear my story and judge for yourself."

"Come right downstairs to the dining-room! Father must hear it, too."

"No—no; I'd rather not."

"But you must. I'm all ready. There's no use in your telling it twice."

"But I don't look just right, Bob. My clothes——"

"Oh, confound your clothes!" cried Bob, seizing Larry by the arm and pulling him out of the room.

Thus it was that Larry came to tell the story of the Talking Rock at Colonel Fuller's table in the presence of the Oakdale magnate, his family, and several guests.

"I'm not surprised," said Colonel Fuller, after the narration was completed. "That man Dana is mean enough for anything. There's no sort of doubt in my mind that it was Joe who shot the pony. I'd have him arrested if there was any chance of proving it—and just as like as not it was he whom

Larry heard plotting against us behind those rocks. I suppose there must be some sort of a cave in there under the bluff—there is no other way to account for it that I can see.”

“I hardly think Joe Dana would shoot the pony,” ventured Larry, “and I wouldn’t like to say that it was his voice I heard.”

“Pshaw! You don’t know the breed,” answered the colonel, angrily. “Look here, Larry White, you understand all about boats and all about running an engine, and Bob wants your help. I put the Comet in charge of both of you. The Academy military company shall stand regular guard over her till the day of the race. Not a soul must go aboard except yourselves. Now, mind. I shall hold you both to strict account. I’ll show old Dana that he can’t come his tricks over me.”

Now this race was Colonel Fuller’s hobby at that particular time, just as it had been the one topic of conversation among the students at both the Academy and the Institute for the past two weeks.

The day following the sinking of the Sphinx General Dana had sent the Minnie over to Oakdale with instructions to have her left at the little pier in front of Colonel Fuller’s house.

Of course the colonel sent the launch back immediately, and with it an angry note, stating that if he found her on his premises again he should sink her in the lake.

Determined to be in advance of his enemy in everything, the magnate of Oakdale immediately dispatched an agent to a certain large town not far distant, with instructions to purchase an elegant new steam launch, in every way the superior of the Minnie, which a boat-builder of his acquaintance was known to have for sale.

This was the Comet alluded to by Colonel Fuller.

She had entered the lake by way of the Hamden river, and was even then lying in the boat-house at the foot of the Academy lawn.

Of course the next thing in order was a challenge for the Minnie.

The challenge had been duly accepted, and the following Wednesday had been appointed to test the relative speed of the two launches, over a course mutually agreed upon, extending from Petersboro’ at the foot of the lake, to Wimble’s Island, which lay at the entrance to the Crooked Pass, a distance of exactly five miles.

Hence the significance of the conversation overheard by Larry White at the Talking Rock.

Upon leaving the table, Colonel Fuller, Bob and Larry hurried to the boat-house.

A careful examination of the launch and her machinery showed them that whatever might be the intentions of the Danaites nothing had been attempted yet.

That night the “Oakdale Guards,” as the Academy military company was called, took charge of the boat-house; nor did they leave it alone for a single instant up to the morning of the race.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BOAT RACE.

“We’ll show ’em, boys! We’ll show ’em!” chuckled Colonel Fuller, rubbing his hands, as he stepped from the Comet into a trim little yacht—his own particular property and especial pride. “Do your best now, and under no circumstances permit a living soul to come on board. Bob—Larry—if you let them beat us by hook or by crook, don’t either of you every dare to look me in the face again.”

It was a perfect gala day for the whole region about Lake Corrina.

Long before daylight crowds could have been seen wending

their way in every sort of vehicle, from a barouche to a hay-cart, from as far off as Downingtown, all bound for the neighborhood of Wimble Island where the exciting part of the contest must inevitably occur; while in addition every boat on the lake that could boast of sail was pressed into service.

As the yacht containing Colonel and Mrs. Fuller, Dr. Duffington, the principal of the Academy, Professor Gerund, the Latin teacher, and several others of the faculty filled away for Wimble Island, the Minnie was seen to put off from Hamden and steam slowly in the direction of Peterboro’, the starting point of the race.

She was accompanied by General Dana’s yacht, gaudily decorated with flags and bunting, from whose deck the blare of the Hamden brass band could be distinctly heard, swept toward them by the morning breeze.

It was a gay scene, and no mistake.

The course was fairly lined with boats from Oakdale and Hamden, some filled with students from the rival schools, others with towns-people, while the lake shores on both sides—there was not a quarter of a mile between them up at Wimble Island—were black with people anxiously awaiting the contest to come.

Perhaps it made Larry a bit nervous to see Miss Minnie Dana cast anxious glances in his direction now and then from the deck of her father’s yacht, but it disturbed neither of the boys to learn that Joe Dana was to have charge of the Minnie; it only made them more determined than ever to do their best.

But there was something more than mere pride at stake, though we have neglected to mention it, for the selectmen of the town of Oakdale had voted a handsome gold medal to the winner, and neither Bob nor Larry had the slightest intention of allowing the Hamden Institute to carry off the prize.

Precisely at twelve o’clock the start was made.

But few of the accompanying boats had remained at Peterboro, and as a consequence it was not until the vicinity of Wimble Island was reached that the excitement could be said to have fairly begun.

As the launches steamed in sight of Colonel Fuller’s yacht, the magnate of Oakdale perceived to his intense disgust that the Minnie was several lengths ahead.

On the Hamden side of the lake the excitement was tremendous.

People ran along the bank cheering, shouting, waving hats and handkerchiefs, while the boats on both sides pressed toward the island with all the power of oars or sail.

“Three cheers for the Hamden Institute!” “Three cheers for Joe Dana!” shouted the students in the boat on the west side of the lake, as Colonel Fuller leveled his powerful marine glass at the contesting launches.

“Confound those fellows! What are they thinking of?” roared the Oakdale magnate. “As true as I live they’ve taken some one in with them in spite of all I said. It’s a man! He’s fighting with Bob! It’s treachery, by thunder! By all that’s good, Dana shall pay for this.”

“See! See! They are gaining on the Minnie!” cried Dr. Duffington, in great excitement. “Larry is crowding her for all she’s worth.”

“Yes, and Bob has got the best of the fellow, whoever he is,” added the colonel, lowering his glass. “He has him down, that’s sure, and is steering as he should. Give it to ’em, boys! Give it to ’em! You’ll come out ahead yet.”

Evidently the fight on board the Comet had been seen by other eyes than those of Colonel Fuller, for among the occupants of the surrounding boats the greatest confusion could be seen to prevail.

Now came the critical moment, and the excitement was intense.

As the launches shot past the line of Wimble Island, neither,

so far as could be seen from the deck of the yacht, had the advantage by so much as an inch.

"Neck and neck!" shouted the colonel. "One second more and all is over. Confound those trees—they've cut off our view and—by Jove! Bob's done it! Three cheers for the Comet! Three cheers for Oakdale!"

And all along the line of the east side of the lake echoed the cry:

"Three cheers for the Comet! Three cheers for Oakdale!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DANAITE'S LITTLE TRICK.

What had happened on board the Comet? How was it that in spite of Colonel Fuller's express orders, a third person had been taken into the launch?

Questions of the importance of these should be answered without delay.

The launches had started from Peterboro' together, at sound of a pistol shot fired, as had been previously arranged, by Dr. Glassbrook, the mayor.

As they steamed off into the lake there was a distance of perhaps twenty feet between them, their prows being just about on an even line.

Larry had taken charge of the engine of the Comet by Bob's particular desire, for having served a year's apprenticeship on board a steamer which had formerly plied between Peterboro and Downingtown, but which had been unfortunately blown up shortly before the opening of our story, he was certainly something of a professional, and could get better work out of the Comet on a trying occasion, as Bob had good sense enough to see.

"Crowd her for all she's worth now, old man," Bob had said. "I'll attend to the steering, and if we don't show the Minnie our heels we'll know the reason why."

In fact, this interesting operation had already begun, for although not yet outside the Porcupines—two small islands between which the launches were obliged to run in leaving Peterboro harbor—the Comet had gained upon the Minnie as much as a dozen yards.

"Bet you ten dollars to five the Minnie wins," shouted Joe Dana from the rival craft.

"Leave betting to the spectators," called Bob in return. "We've got as much as we can do to attend to our business and steam the race."

"Hush! hush! for goodness sake don't answer him, Bob," whispered Larry. "Don't you see it's only a trick to draw off your attention. See how wildly you've been steering; by the time we have the course again the Minnie will have picked up on us almost as much as we had gained on her."

"By thunder! but you're right, Larry," replied Bob, looking about him uneasily.

The wisdom of Larry's advice was soon evident, for during the next twenty minutes the Comet continued to gain steadily on the Minnie.

By the time they were abreast of the Oakdale Academy she was so far in advance that success seemed assured.

"Well, this settles it," remarked Bob, relaxing his attention at last. "Joe can't get the best of us now, let him try as he will. Guess they ain't going to attempt to come any tricks over us, Larry—what do you think?"

"Don't be too sure, Bob. 'Twon't do to trust the Danaites."

"I know that; but what can they do?"

"I'm sure I don't know, but I haven't forgotten what I heard at the Talking Rock."

"Nor I, either. Still, I don't see what they can do."

"Mind your helm!" shouted Larry, suddenly. "There's a

boat ahead of us, just shooting out from among the Hen and Chickens. By gracious! we are too late. The man is crazy! She's gone!"

The Hen and Chickens were a group of small islands, alongside of which the Comet was at that moment steaming at the top of her speed.

It almost seemed as though the man who pulled the small boat must have crossed their path intentionally, so sudden had been his appearance.

Before Bob had time to turn the launch to the port side, she had struck the boat, cutting her in two like a knife.

Larry pulled the lever and stopped the engine instantly.

"Help! Halp! Save me! Save me!" shouted the boatman, a rough-looking fellow, whom both the boys recognized as an idle, vicious person belonging in Downingtown, whose name was Sam Slade.

Of course there was no help for it.

In spite of the delay which would necessarily occur, the boys could not refuse to save a fellow being from death. Bob threw a rope hastily, calling out to the man to catch it.

Instead of doing so he managed to miss it, not only once but several times, handling himself so clumsily, in fact, that it was many minutes before they drew him, wet and dripping, into the launch, sinking down apparently unconscious in the little craft.

The Minnie, meanwhile, had continued steadily on her course, and as a natural consequence of all this delay, was now at some little distance ahead.

"Confound the luck! We're dished now!" cried Bob, in dismay. "Here, Larry, we'll have to go to work on this fellow. The race must be given up."

But Larry had already started the engine again, and did not move.

"It is all a trick," he said, emphatically. "Sam Slade can swim as well as you or I, and I know it."

"But we can't be sure of that. He may die on our hands, and then I'll be blamed."

"No, he won't; he's only playing 'possum. Attend to your steering, Bob Fuller, and leave him alone. I'll bet you what you like he was laying for us behind the island, and crossed our path on purpose to cause delay and make us lose the race."

"If I thought that, Larry, I'd pitch him overboard."

"It wouldn't do. See, we are gaining on the Minnie again. Just you leave him alone."

The rival launches sped on.

"Inch by inch the Comet gained on the Minnie; the lines of the spectators' boats were now on either side of them, and Wimble Island close at hand.

"Crowd her, Larry! Crowd her!" cried Bob in dismay.

The words had scarce left his lips when his legs were seized and Bob found himself dragged down upon the bottom of the launch.

"You will try to drown me, will you?" shouted the supposed dead man, suddenly finding himself in the full possession of his strength again. "I'll show you, you young rascal! I'll learn you how to handle a boat!"

And before Larry could fairly realize what was going on, the man was pommeling poor Bob most unmercifully.

In an instant he discovered that he had tackled the wrong man.

"Don't interfere, Larry!" shouted Bob, springing to his feet. "Crowd her! Stick to it. I'm good for him! You may pitch me overboard if this mean trick makes us lose the race!"

And throwing himself upon his antagonist, who evidently would have thrown him overboard had the thing been possible, Bob soon made it plain to the fellow that he had met his match.

In less than a minute he had thrown him down, and, plant-

ing his whole weight upon him, managed to tie his hands with the life line.

Without even attempting to rise, Bob grasped the tiller once more.

The launches were neck and neck now, and Wimble Island not ten rods away.

As they passed the little wooded point at the end of the island, the Comet shot ahead half her length, coming abreast a great white rock which formed the goal, while cheer after cheer from the Academy boys rent the air.

The Danaites had tried their little trick, and it had signally failed.

An hour later, in the Town Hall at Oakdale, the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen placed the handsome gold medal in Bob Fuller's hand in the presence of his father and every one connected with the Academy, not to mention the admiring crowd of towns-people which had jammed itself into the hall.

CHAPTER IX.

A BOLD PROJECT WHICH RESULTED IN AN ELECTION.

"I want the undivided attention of every boy in the school," said Colonel Fuller, one afternoon, in the following March, after the usual school session had come to a close. "I have a project on hand which I am certain will prove both pleasant and instructive, and which, if managed properly, may prove somewhat profitable to the entertainment fund of the Academy as well."

Of course the boys were all attention.

"You are all aware," he began, "that after our race last fall, the relations existing between General Dana and myself grew no more cordial than they had been before."

A general titter ran through the assemblage.

"You may laugh," continued the great man of Oakdale, good-humoredly, "but I want you to understand that I shall make this no laughing matter for my friend, General Dana."

"As you are aware, he was engaged all last summer in building a steamboat—the General—which now makes regular trips between Peterboro and Downingtown."

"You are also aware that no sooner was the steamboat announced than I began the construction of a railroad between Downingtown and Peterboro, working from both ends of the line, until now the track is almost completed, and in another month trains will be run."

Now all this the Academy boys knew perfectly.

"Now then, boys, my plan is this," continued the colonel; "you have learned something about building railroads, and I propose that you shall also learn how to run them."

"It will not pay to send more than four trains a day over the road, and these will be run morning and evening, just as the steamer makes morning and evening trips up and down the lake, and at such times as shall not interfere with the regular sessions of the school."

"The running of the road, in fact the road itself, is to be placed entirely in your hands. I have kept a careful record of the amount of labor each boy has performed, and shall now award to each stock in the Peterboro and Downingtown Railway Company as compensation for services rendered, figured at the regular rate of wages I should have had to pay others if you had not performed the work."

As the railroad was built as much for your benefit as for any other purpose, I shall, after the award of stock, has been made according to the plan proposed, divide the remainder equally among you, share and share alike."

"Three cheers for Colonel Fuller!" shouted Ed Topliffe, from away down at the other end of the hall, and they were given with a right good will.

It was a good hour before the meeting broke up, and each

boy retired from the hall with a due sense of increased importance, for each and every one of them enjoyed for the first time the novel experience of finding himself a stockholder in an actual railroad, for the Peterboro and Downingtown line, be it understood, was no toy.

"Now then, the next thing is to meet and elect your officers!" shouted the colonel, as they started to leave the hall.

"I suggest next Saturday afternoon. Say at half-past three."

The suggestion of Colonel Fuller was adopted.

Promptly at the appointed time the students at the Oakdale Academy gathered in the great hall.

"Ain't your father coming, Bob?" demanded Bill Wright, after some little time had been spent in "electioneering" among the boys who had gathered in little groups about the room.

"No," answered Bob, "he told me he shouldn't be here. He thinks that the whole matter of the election should rest with the owners of the road. He ain't a stockholder, and consequently has no right to a vote."

"I move that Bob Fuller be chosen chairman," shouted Sam Gardiner.

The movement was carried unanimously.

Next tellers were chosen and ballots prepared.

"Say, Larry, who are you going to vote for?" whispered Ben Spurr, taking Larry White by the arm and drawing him a little to one side.

"I don't know that it's any of your business."

"Maybe not. But don't get mad. I want to be president of this railroad, and there's lots of the fellows who think I ought to be. I'm the oldest scholar in the academy, don't you see?"

"No, I don't see. Bob ought to be president. If it hadn't been for him we'd never have had the road."

"Then you intend to vote for him?"

"I didn't say so."

"But you mean to. Look here, Larry White, I'll give you ten of my shares and two dollars to boot, if you'll just work around among the boys a bit for me. They all like you, and——"

"Get out. I shan't do anything of the sort," retorted Larry, indignantly.

"I'll appoint you engineer or conductor, either you wish."

"If you say another word about it, Ben Spurr, I'll tell the whole school you tried to bribe me—now mind."

"I'll get square with you, Larry White!" hissed Ben between his teeth, as he walked away.

"I wonder if he really has got any one to vote for him?" thought Larry, as the tellers carried the hats off to one side of the hall and began to count the votes.

He was soon to know.

In a moment or two Jack Goodwin, who was one of the tellers, jumped on a chair and called for order.

"There had been eighty-six votes cast for the president of the Peterboro and Downingtown Railway," he shouted, "and I will now announce the result:

"Robert Fuller has seventy votes, Ben Spurr ten, and Ed Topliffe six."

"Three cheers for Bob Fuller!" shouted half the boys in the hall.

And they made the hall fairly ring with their cries.

"Look out for squalls, Larry White," whispered Ben Spurr, as the meeting broke up; "you could have helped me to twenty votes if you would have only said the word."

But Larry only laughed.

There seemed little reason why he should feel anxious to help Ben Spurr.

CHAPTER X.

DRIVING THE SILVER SPIKE.

"Larry! Oh, Larry! Hold on a moment, will you? We want to speak to you."

Now it happened that Larry White had no desire whatever to speak with Joe Dana right there in the open lake in plain sight of Oakdale wharf, where Colonel Fuller, Bob, or in fact, any of the academy boys could see them just as well as not, if they chose to look.

Still, how could he refuse, when pretty Minnie Dana, leaning over the rail of the yacht, added her request to that of her brother, that Larry should come alongside with his boat.

"Do, please, Mr. White. We all want to see them drive the silver spike so much. Even if Colonel Fuller is a horrid, mean man, who has used papa shamefully, he's not an ogre to devour us. There can be no objection to our standing on the public road at Oakdale if we do belong on the other side of the lake."

Now, it was entirely against Larry's interest to have anything to do with Joe Dana—especially at that particular time.

If he was to be a Fullerite it was absolutely necessary to be true to his colors, and as this day promised to be one of the most famous in the annals of Oakdale, or the history of its academy, it behooved him to be particularly true now for reasons we shall presently show.

The organization of the Peterboro and Downingtown Railway Company had been a complete success as far as any scheme on paper can be so termed.

Bob Fuller had been elected president, Ed Topliffe, vice-president; Sam Gardner was to be the secretary, and steady-going Jack Goodwin the treasurer. As for Ben Spurr, he had been unanimously elected to nothing at all.

The stock of the company had been divided among the boys according to the plan proposed by Colonel Fuller, some receiving more, some less, according to the amount of labor of each—it had all been entirely voluntary—upon the road.

Besides the elective officers there were several positions within the appointment of the president, to obtain which there had been much keen competition.

The outcome had been that Bill Wright was appointed conductor, Hen Blatchford and Ed Carrington brakemen, while Larry White obtained that which in the eyes of the boys seemed the most desirable appointment of all—engineer.

He was to run the train.

Now this was not all Bob's doings, though it suited him exactly.

Colonel Fuller had suggested it, not only because he believed Larry to be entirely competent, but because he was poor and needed the money; for it was proposed that to the engineer's position should be attached a small salary, since it would necessarily consume more of the time of whichever of the boys held it than any other on the road.

"I'll have it fixed so that Larry can recite his lessons in the evening," Colonel Fuller had said. "The boy is smart. He needs the money, and he shall have the place. To run the locomotive, we must have some one with a clear head, and on whom we can thoroughly rely."

So it was arranged, and we venture to say that every boy in Oakdale Academy was glad to see Larry get the place, unless, indeed, Ben Spurr offered the exception to the rule.

Three splendid brand new cars had come down from Troy, and a locomotive of sufficient draught for the work required had been built in Buffalo, and even now stood ready on the track in front of the round-house, which had been erected close by the Oakdale wharf.

The Peterboro and Downingtown Railway was no longer merely a scheme on paper, but a reality, and this particular day in April—we believe it was the 15th—was to witness the laying of the last rail, the driving of the last spike, and the starting of the first train which was to run down to Peterboro and return.

It was to be a perfect gala day for Oakdale, Downingtown and Peterboro, and, in fact, the whole east side of the lake.

Larry had started from home in the Fox, as usual, and had arrived just off Oakdale wharf, when he encountered Joe Dana's yacht, as we have seen.

"I have no idea that any one will interfere with you whatever place you select," was Larry's reply to Joe Dana's remark. "Colonel Fuller is a gentleman whatever you may think of him. You can land at the wharf and see it all just the same as any one else."

"Yes, but I don't want to have trouble," answered Joe, persistently. "Can't you show us a good place, Larry? You see, we've quite a party on board."

"Do, Mr. White," added Minnie. "We shall all be very much obliged to you, I'm sure."

Thus urged, Larry felt that he could not, in common politeness, refuse.

Much against his wishes, therefore, Larry accompanied the yacht to the Oakdale wharf and piloted the little party to a good position near the tier of seats which had been erected for Colonel Fuller and his particular friends, close beside that part of the track upon which stood the locomotive attached to the cars all ready for a start.

"What in the world were you doing with Joe Dana and his crowd, Larry?" demanded Bob Fuller, as the boy hurried up to where his friends had stationed themselves.

Larry told him.

"I wouldn't have done it, then, if I'd been you," said Bob. "They are a treacherous lot, as you and I know. It's lucky the governor didn't see you, or I ain't so sure that you'd be engineer after all."

Bob was vexed, and Larry saw it, so, without attempting to reply he took his station with the rest of the Academy boys, prepared to witness the ceremony of completing the road.

There was an immense crowd gathered.

Bob Fuller and Ed Topliffe had been chosen to lay the last rail, and at a given signal each seized an end with a pair of rail-tongs and laid it in its place, directly in front of the locomotive, as the band stationed on the grand-stand—so the tier of seats had been dubbed—struck up "Hail Columbia," and amid a round of deafening cheers from the Academy boys and invited guests.

"Now, then, every boy in the Academy must strike a blow upon the spikes!" shouted Colonel Fuller, who acted as master of ceremonies, "and Jennie shall drive the last one home."

The allusion was to Miss Jennie Fuller, the colonel's daughter, the prettiest girl in all Oakdale.

The band kept it up merrily while the spike driving was in progress.

Then Colonel Fuller made a little speech, while Bob placed the last spike—it was of solid silver—in position, and with a few blows of the hammer drove it part way into the tie.

This accomplished, Miss Jennie, tastefully attired in an exceedingly pretty costume, was led in front of the locomotive by her father, and as the band struck up the "Star Spangled Banner," with her own delicate hands struck the final blow.

It was done.

The railroad was completed amid a perfect storm of applause and a violent waving of handkerchiefs and hats.

When Colonel Fuller in a loud voice announced the fact, there was a grand scramble for the cars, as it was perfectly evident that there were not seats enough to accommodate all hands.

"Now for the engine, Larry," said Bob. "I'm going with you in the cab. We'll show your friends, the Danaites, that their old tub of a steamer is nowhere before we get through."

"Don't call them my friends, Bob," protested Larry.

"Well, what did you bring them here for if they are not your friends? I'm certain they all went on board the train."

To avoid the necessity of a reply Larry leaped after Bob into the cab.

Steam was all up, and everything had been put in readiness by the engineer of the Oakdale Hosiery Mills, acting under the orders of Colonel Fuller.

Not a little excited at the novelty of his position, Larry, at the signal from Bill Wright, pulled the lever and attempted to start the train.

To the astonishment of both the boys the locomotive refused to move.

CHAPTER XI.

LARRY AND THE FULLERITES HAVE A FALLING OUT.

"What's the matter?" demanded Bob Fuller. "Why don't the old thing start?"

"What is it? Why don't you let Larry see what's the matter?" replied the colonel. "He knows more about a locomotive than you do. Larry, look alive there! Find out what ails this confounded machine."

"Excuse me, father, but Larry White shan't touch the machinery of this locomotive again if I know it. I am president of this railroad, and I want you to order him out of the cab."

Every one started.

As for Larry, his confusion was, for the instant, so great that he could not speak.

"Excuse me, Robert," said Colonel Fuller, slowly, "since you have taken the trouble to remind me that I have no control over the Peterboro and Downingtown Railroad, I will mildly suggest that I can have no possible right to order your employees about. Mr. President, I bid you good-day."

"Bob, what can you mean?" stammered Larry. "Colonel Fuller, I ask you to wait a moment. I—I—"

"Get out, traitor!" cried Bob, suddenly giving him a push. "Go over to your friends, the Danaites, where you belong!"

Larry, who was standing close to the steps, went flying out of the locomotive cab, and fell sprawling on the sand.

"For shame!" cried a dozen voices.

"Robert, my son, control yourself!" whispered the colonel.

And, stepping to the side of the young engineer, he assisted him to rise.

"Now, then, what is the meaning of all this?" he demanded, sternly. "If things are going to be run after this fashion I'll foreclose the bonds I hold on the railroad and take it out of the stockholders' hands."

There was a humorous twinkle in the corner of the colonel's eye; nevertheless, Bob knew that he meant just what he said.

"It means that Larry is a traitor, father. He brought Joe Dana and a whole lot of the Institute fellows over here. Some one has been fooling with the locomotive. I say it was Joe Dana, and I believe Larry put him up to it. Look at this!"

And Bob Fuller held up in plain sight of everybody an oily handkerchief with Joe Dana's name.

"I found this in the cab," he added. "I don't know what ails the locomotive. Send for Mr. Head, the engineer of the mill. Perhaps he can find out. Anyway, Larry White shan't enter this cab again."

By this time a considerable crowd had gathered.

Nearly all the Academy boys had left the cars and many of the townspeople besides.

Larry meanwhile stood quietly by the side of Colonel Fuller, very pale, but not offering to speak.

The boy was innocent of even the slightest thought of treachery, yet he realized in what a miserable light he had placed himself, simply by being polite to Joe Dana and his sister and escorting them from the yacht.

"Well, why don't you say something?" shouted Colonel Fuller, his anger rising with his suspicion. "Do you know any-

thing? Can you tell us how that handkerchief came to be in the cab? Speak up now, and talk quick."

"I have nothing to say, sir," was Larry's reply. "I know no more about this matter than Bob himself."

"Be careful, Larry White. If you have made a mistake I'm ready to forgive you, and Bob shall apologize. If you have been playing tricks with that locomotive you shall suffer for it, now mind."

Just then Ben Spurr elbowed his way through the crowd.

"I don't want to get any one into trouble, Colonel Fuller," he began with some confusion, "but I think I ought to tell you that I saw Larry White and Joe Dana hanging around the engine a while ago."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I didn't think it amounted to anything, sir."

"We'll find out what it amounts to, then!" shouted the great man of Oakdale, in a torrent of passion.

"Here, you young viper, — Confound the fellow, he's taken himself off! Where's Captain Coats, the constable? I'll have him arrested. Look alive now, boys! Catch him—catch Joe Dana, too, if you can find him! These are pretty goings on!"

Sure enough, Larry was gone.

They looked for him everywhere, but they did not find him.

Strangely enough, no one once thought of the Fox, to which poor Larry had hurried as his only friend.

Entering the leaky skiff, he pushed off upon the lake.

This in itself was a foolish move.

Yet, under the circumstances, perhaps it was just as well.

Long before any one thought of the possibility of his having taken his departure by boat Larry had rounded the little wooded point which extends itself into Lake Corrina just beyond Oakdale wharf, and was out of sight.

His feelings were deeply wounded.

He felt that Bob Fuller had acted in a most unfriendly manner in condemning without giving him an opportunity to speak a word in self-defense.

What had happened to the locomotive he neither knew nor cared just then.

But long before he had reached his humble home by the lake-side the boy had grown calmer, and was positively relieved to see the train go whizzing along the shore with Mr. Head and Bob in the cab.

"This ends my life in Oakdale Academy," he thought; "but after all, I'm glad there was no serious damage done."

CHAPTER XII.

BEN SPURR PROPOSES A LITTLE SCHEME.

"To the right about, face! March!"

A platoon of young soldiers wheeling about, and moving forward as one man.

"Halt!"

The platoon came to a dead stop.

"Ground arms!"

Twenty muskets fell to the ground with a thud.

"Break ranks!" shouted Colonel Bob, and the discipline of the day is at an end.

The month was June.

Company B, of the Oakdale Rifles, as the Academy military organization was termed, were encamped on Wimble Island.

One night had already been spent upon the island, and the second day was now drawing toward its close.

"There goes the General!" shouted Ed Topliffe, as the boys, having stacked their arms, began to scatter themselves about the camp.

"Where?" asked Bob, who stood talking with Ben Spurr.

"Over there. Can't you see her? She's making for the Seven Pines, Mrs. Montgomery's place."

Sure enough, there was the steamer.

"I'll bet you what you like that Mrs. Montgomery is going to give a party to-night," said Ben Spurr. "I heard something about it several days ago. Pity your governor ain't on good terms with the old lady, Bob. I hear they have bully times at her house, and she sets a famous spread."

"Well, it ain't his fault that she sees fit to side with old Dana," answered Bob. "You are right, Ben; the General is making for the Seven Pines. By George! I'd like to spoil their fun."

Now it is altogether probable that Bob, at the moment, meant by this seemingly ill-natured remark just nothing at all.

Ben Spurr, who was always up to mischief, took it quite seriously, however, and saw in it a good chance to do what he had long wished to accomplish—to curry a little favor with Bob.

"Look here," he said, along about nine o'clock, just as the boys were thinking of turning into the tents for the night. "I'll tell you what would be a jolly trick to play on the Dana-ites—it would square us up on the locomotive affair."

Now it may be remarked incidentally that the locomotive had been found to be but little injured.

The breaking of a certain pin had caused the trouble.

Mr. Head, the engineer of the hosiery mill, had taken the engine in hand, and speedily devised a temporary substitute for the broken pin, starting the train without any very great loss of time.

The trip to Peterboro had been entirely successful, and the road was now running regularly.

It was asserted by Mr. Head that the pin had been broken maliciously.

Perhaps so. No one knew.

Joe Dana and his party had gone off in the yacht. Larry had been sought in vain.

"Let the matter drop," Colonel Fuller had said, when Bob proposed to have Larry arrested. "We've found the fellow out—let that suffice. Don't let him dare to show his face around my premises again—that's all I've got to say."

So Larry lost his scholarship in the Oakdale Academy, and on the same day, without warning or explanation, his father was discharged from the mill.

"What's your scheme, Ben?" asked Bob, rather doubtfully. "You know my father don't approve of our playing tricks on the Danaites."

"Well, my move, then, is that as soon as it's good and dark we get over to the Seven Pines and capture the General."

"What! Old Dana?" cried Bob, aghast.

"No, no. The steamer. There's no one aboard of her, I'll bet you a dollar, except Larry White, and maybe a deck-hand or two. You can see for yourself she's tied up at Mrs. Montgomery's pier, where they intend to keep her until the party is through."

"By gracious! that would be just roaring fun," spoke up Ed Topliffe. "Fancy the Danaites footing it all the way home to the Institute. Why, it's a good three miles."

"How do you know Larry White is on board the General?" demanded Bob, who, it must be confessed, was somewhat taken with the scheme.

"Oh, I heard so," replied Ben, indefinitely. "He's engineer on the General. Has been for more than a week."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"What would we do with the General if we were to capture her?"

"Oh, run her across to the other side of the lake and tie her up somewhere on the edge of the woods."

"It would set old Dana raving."

"You can just bet it would," exclaimed Jack Goodwin, "and I say, Bob, you owe Larry one, you know."

"Come, what do you say?" continued Ben; "shall I call up the boys? Now is just the time to start. We can muffle our oars and be alongside before any one gets wind of what we're up to."

Bob still hesitated, but it was only for a moment.

The sentiment of all seemed so unanimously in favor of the plan that only at the risk of making himself unpopular could he refuse.

All hands were mustered, and Ben's little scheme proposed.

Of course there was no objection—Bob's was the only dissenting voice.

"Well, all right. We'll try it," he said at length; "but mind, now, not a thing must be injured. If there's any damage done I shall be held responsible. Ten to one I shall catch Hail Columbia from the governor as it is."

"And Larry White? What shall we do with him?" inquired Ben Spurr, with malicious satisfaction.

"Oh, tie him up and leave him on board," answered Bob. "I don't care a fig about him."

Half an hour later and five boats pulled silently away from Wimble Island, propelled by muffled oars.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATTACK ON THE GENERAL.

"Lay low, fellows—lay low! Make as little noise as possible. As long as we've started in this business we want to succeed."

"What time is it, Bob?" called Ben from the next boat. "My watch has stopped."

"It wants a quarter to ten. Now, look here, Ben Spurr, if the talking can't stop I'll order a return to the island—you see if I don't."

"Dry up, you fellows," said Ben, in a sepulchral whisper, addressing himself to the boys in the boat next beyond his own, who were chattering in smothered tones.

"It's strange they can't keep quiet even at a time like this," said Bob, with an angry pull at the oar. "I just wish I had Larry White with me instead of against me; that is, if he hadn't gone and turned traitor, I mean. He's worth a dozen Ben Spurrs any day in the week. Don't you think so, Sam?"

"Every time, Bob," was the reply of Sam Gardner, spoken in the same low whisper. "As you say, it's a pity he isn't with us instead of against us. But a Danaite is a Danaite. Larry can't wear your father's colors and General Dana's, too."

Bob did not answer.

He thought it just as well to pretend not to hear.

At the bottom of his heart he liked Larry better than any boy of his acquaintance, and he was sorry that things had come about as they had.

The boats moved on in silence.

The sky, clear at sundown, was now obscured by clouds. There was not a star to be seen.

The boys were all excellent oarsmen—the boat club to which nearly every student at the Academy belonged was responsible for that—and, in spite of the darkness, made good progress, drawing nearer and nearer to the wharf at the Seven Pines as the moments passed.

Before leaving the camp they had donned their fatigue jackets and caps, the regular uniform of the military company, modeled after that of the famous Seventh Regiment of New York city, being liable to attract attention even at a distance and in the night.

The nearer they approached to the steamer the more Bob Fuller began to wish they hadn't come at all.

It was a mean trick they were about to play, and he knew it. Still, having once started, he wouldn't have backed out for the world.

"We are getting awful close, Bob," whispered Ed Topliffe, who had come alongside with the boat of which he had command. "What's the programme? We may as well settle it now."

Bob looked over his shoulder.

They were, as Ed had said, very close to the steamer.

Bob passed the word for all hands to lay back on their oars.

"I can't see a soul on board," he whispered.

"Nor I," answered Ben Spurr, who had pulled his boat close to the colonel's. "I wouldn't wonder if Larry and all hands had gone up to the house."

"Nonsense! Mrs. Montgomery wouldn't give the engineer and deck hands an invitation to her party."

"Maybe not; but she might invite them to a spread in the kitchen with the servants."

"Larry White would starve before he'd accept any such invitation as that. You don't know him as well as I do, Ben."

"Perhaps I don't, but if he ain't at the house where is he? There ought to be a lookout if any one is on board, and I can't see a living soul."

"So much the better, then," put in Ed. "But how are we going to manage? We ought to decide that before we get any nearer, I say."

"I tell you, fellows," said Bob, "suppose we separate? One party, of which Ed Topliffe shall be the leader, can head down the lake, working all the while toward the bows of the steamer, while the rest of us will make directly for the wharf as though we were going to land. If there is any one on the watch they will naturally come aft to have a look at us, and as soon as they do Ed and his fellows can shoot in alongside."

"Well, and what then?" questioned Ed.

"Why, my crowd will suddenly make for the stern and begin to board the General. While we hold the attention of the lookout you fellows can board at the main gangway, don't you see?"

"I see that you give the lookout every chance to sound the alarm."

"No, I don't, either. We'll be onto him before he has time to get his breath."

"I don't think much of your scheme, Bob Fuller."

"If you have any better one to offer, let's have it."

"Here—here, no squabbling," interposed Bill Wright. "Bob's plan is as good as any. Give the word, colonel, and we'll try it, anyway."

The word was given, and the boats moved silently toward the General in the order arranged.

Now, it happened that a lookout had been left on board the steamer, and that lookout was none other than Larry White.

Precisely what Ben Spurr had imagined had taken place, and Larry, too proud to eat in Mrs. Montgomery's kitchen, had remained behind alone.

As luck would have it, the young engineer had gone below to look at his fires as the boats approached.

It was while ascending to the hurricane deck again that his attention was attracted to a slight noise in the direction of the stern.

Larry looked out upon the lake, but could see nothing.

Then he hurried to the stern rail and looked down.

To his utter amazement he beheld three boats beneath him, with half a dozen boys coming up over the guards like so many monkeys, Bob Fuller in the lead.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FULLERITES IN A FIX.

Larry White was as quick as lightning.

The fact that he was high-strung and ready to take offense in no way prevented him from being one of the most active boys on the lake.

Bob Fuller had hold of a rope which had been carelessly left dangling over the stern of the steamer, and was drawing himself upward. Bill Wright was being "boosted" up by Jack Goodwin to the narrow projection outside the guard rail, and half a dozen of the Academy fellows were helping each other up in the same way.

Instantly Larry comprehended his position.

It was no very agreeable one.

Of course he could not hope to hold the steamer single-handed against the Fullerites.

If they should succeed in capturing it—and just then it

looked as though they might—General Dana, his new patron, was certain to suspect him of having a hand in this midnight attack.

It was a very serious matter for Larry.

After the locomotive episode, as has been already shown, Colonel Fuller meanly discharged Mr. White from the Oakdale mills.

For several days things looked black enough.

The Whites were poor people, who lived from hand to mouth.

To have the earnings of the head of the family thus suddenly cut off meant starvation for Larry's mother, his sister and little brother if something was not immediately done.

"Colonel Fuller is a meaner man than I believed could possibly exist," groaned Mr. White one evening two or three days after his discharge. "Of course I don't blame you, my son, except for being so hasty. If you'd only stopped on the ground and tried to explain matters, all this might have been avoided. As it is, I'm sure I don't know what we are going to do."

They sat up half that night talking over the situation. When Larry went to bed at last he had, much against his inclinations, resolved to apply to General Dana for help.

Now Larry did not like General Dana.

At heart he was a Fullerite, and believed the general to be mean and tyrannical.

He would have much preferred to have nothing at all to do with him—to go West and seek his fortune—but there was in his case other considerations which could not be overlooked.

When Larry rang the bell of the Dana mansion next morning it was with trembling hand and quickly beating heart.

When, half an hour later, he ran down the steps and hurried toward the lake shore to return to his home in the Fox, he felt himself the happiest boy in all Oakdale.

He had been received by the great man of Hamden with much cordiality.

"Fuller is an ass," the general had said, when Larry related his story. "Joe has told me all about it, my boy, and I know how deeply he has wronged you both. Look here, I want a smart young fellow to be engineer on the General. How would you like the job?"

"I'd like it first rate, sir, if it would only pay enough," replied Larry, with some hesitation. "You see, my father has lost his place in the mill, and—"

"What! Has that hound discharged your father?" roared the general. "Upon my soul, that is too contemptible for anything. I hadn't heard of that."

"It's a fact, sir. Until father gets work I shall have the whole family on my hands, and—"

"Pshaw! Nonsense! Your father has a situation now," spluttered General Dana. "I'll give him a hundred dollars a month to work for me in the Hamden Woolen Mills. Send him right over, Larry, and as for yourself, you shall have two dollars a day to run the engine of the General, and a chance to attend the Institute beside."

So it was settled.

Next day Mr. White went to work in the woolen mill, while Larry found himself in charge of the engine of the General—a position of which he had every right to be proud.

And it was the thought of all this which flashed across Larry's mind as he beheld Bob Fuller and his companions in the boats.

Resistance was not to be thought of.

If he was to save the General, he had not an instant to lose.

Now, Larry knew that which Bob did not.

It was the fact that it had been proposed by General Dana to use the General that evening to take all present at Mrs. Montgomery's party for a sail on the lake.

Even now the Institute boys were on their way down to the little pier at which the steamer lay, and if he could only delay matters for a moment, and make his desperate situation known, Larry was well aware that he would have assistance in plenty, and to spare.

Without wasting a second, the boy sprang away from the rail and rushed for the pilot-house.

Toot! toot! toot! Toot! toot! toot!

Loud and shrill sounded the General's whistle upon the still night air.

Toot! toot! toot! Toot! toot! toot!

The whistle sounded again as Ed Topliffe and the others came over the rail at the steamer's waist.

At the same instant from the other side of the General—the side toward the wharf—a wild shout was heard, and the Institute fellows came tearing down the hill on the dead run.

"Great flapjacks! this settles us," whispered Jack Goodwin. "We'd better get back to the boats again, boys, without a moment's delay."

"Not much!" shouted Bob. "We've come here for the

steamer, and I, for one, mean that we shall have it. Lay around on the other side, boys! Give it to the Danaites if they try to board! There's time enough yet to cast off the lines, and I'm the man for that!"

"Hey, Joe—Joe!" Larry was heard to shout. "Be quick! Pirates! I'm boarded by the Fullerites! Come on—come on!"

"Confusion! This won't do!" cried Bob, as the boys dashed around to the other side of the steamer. "Ed, you look to casting off the lines. I'll tackle Larry. He understands the engine, and I don't—at least, I don't want to attempt to run it! He must be captured or the jig is up."

Bob rushed toward the pilot-house just in time to see Larry emerging from the door, while Ed Topliffe leaped upon the wharf and began casting off the lines.

He had barely time to accomplish his purpose when the Danaites, with Joe at their head, appeared on the wharf.

"Here! hold on there! What in thunder are you fellows trying to do?" yelled Joe Dana, springing forward.

Ed saw him coming, and realized his danger.

Without wasting an instant he leaped back on board the steamer, which, propelled by the wind blowing strongly off shore, had already begun to drift away from the wharf.

"Ha, ha, ha! Three groans for Joe Dana!" he yelled, as he gained the deck.

He was just in time.

Even now the distance between the steamer and the wharf had become so great that any attempt on the part of the Danaites to repeat Ed's experiment would have been useless.

Groans, hisses and derisive shouts filled the air as the steamer continued to drift farther and farther away.

"I'll make you fellows pay for this. I'll have you all arrested!" bawled Joe Dana, running up and down the wharf shouting like a lunatic. "Come back with that steamer, will you, Larry? Hey, Larry! what the mischief are you about?"

As for the remainder of the Institute fellows, they could do nothing but stare stupidly.

The steamer was moving, and they could not stop her.

Then some one shouted out something about boats, and all hands made a dart for Mrs. Montgomery's boat-house, which, as luck would have it, was a good quarter of a mile down the shore.

"Look here, Ned, this won't do!" exclaimed Jack Goodwin. "Some one has got to get into the engine room. Where's Bob? What in thunder is the fellow thinking of, I'd like to know?"

"He went on deck to capture Larry. Hasn't he come back?"

"No, he hasn't. Go up and see what's the matter with him, will you?"

Ed Topliffe started for the deck.

As a matter of course half the boys followed him.

To the surprise and consternation of all, not a trace of either Bob Fuller or Larry White could be found.

"Maybe they ran down in the engine-room," suggested Bill Wright.

Then came a grand rush below.

They found the engine-room wholly deserted.

A thorough search of every nook and corner failed to throw any light upon the mystery.

"He must have gone overboard," said Jack Goodwin, hollowly. "And a mighty bad job it is, for Bob can't swim a stroke."

Meanwhile the General had moved a long distance away from the wharf.

The boys were adrift without captain, pilot, or engineer.

"It's all Ben Spurr's fault," said Ed Topliffe, at last. "There ain't one of us who knows the first blessed thing about an engine, and just like as not Bob is drowned—he's got us all into a pretty fix."

But where was Ben?

Now for the first time the boys noticed his absence.

And propelled by the force of the wind the General continued to drift across the lake.

CHAPTER XV.

LARRY SAVES BOB FULLER'S LIFE.

But what, meantime, had become of Bob Fuller?

Leaving the members of Company B to take to the boats—which, most fortunately, had been made fast to the steamer at the time of boarding—let us follow their captain and learn what had caused his disappearance just at the time when he was wanted most.

Larry found himself face to face with Bob as he emerged from the door of the pilot-house.

He saw at a glance that there was trouble at hand.

"See here, what do you fellows want on board this steamer?" he demanded, stiffly. "I never thought, Bob Fuller, to see you engaged in any such mean business as this."

Bob turned as red as a turkey cock.

"Larry White, you are my prisoner," he said, pompously. "Company B has captured the General, and we are going to have a little fun with her. Go down into the engine-room and be ready to start her when I give you the bell."

"I shan't do anything of the sort—do you think I'm crazy?"

"It don't make any difference what I think—it's what I say that concerns you. A traitor has no right to think. You do just as I tell you—do you understand?"

"Joe! Joe!" shouted Larry, making a dash for the rail on the side nearest to the wharf.

But Bob was too quick for him.

Flinging himself upon Larry—it was at the very instant that Ed Topliffe took his dangerous leap—he seized the young engineer by the waist and flung him to the deck.

"Do what you're told!" he hissed, his temper mastering him completely. "Mind, now, don't you sing out like that again."

But Larry was to be cowered by no such threats.

He was on his feet in an instant.

The next, he found himself grappling with Bob Fuller in a rough-and-tumble fight.

"Let go of me, confound you!" shouted Bob, finding that his antagonist was likely to get the best of him. "Let go, unless you want to get hurt."

In their scuffle the boys had worked their way up to the rail on the lake side of the steamer, and Bob, who had lost all control of himself, now crowded Larry hard against it and endeavored to push him over into the lake.

"Look out! Look out! You'll have me overboard!" cried Larry.

"I don't care. I'll throw you over if you don't let go my coat! I——"

Bob's sentence remained uncompleted, for, at that instant the rail, which was but a flimsy affair at best, suddenly gave way, and before either of the boys had time to realize what had happened they were floundering in the lake.

Fortunately they struck clear of the boats of the Fullerites and both immediately sank beneath the surface of the water.

Larry was the first to rise to the surface.

Knowing Bob as he did, he was, of course, aware that he was unable to swim a stroke.

In an instant all thought of anger, all desire for revenge, had vanished from the breast of the generous boy, who, at the bottom of his heart was quite as fond of Bob Fuller as that hot-headed youth was of him.

It was a wretchedly dark night.

If the moon, or even the stars, had shone it might have been different. As it was, Larry could see nothing of Bob at all.

He could hear the groans of the Fullerites and the shouting of the Danaites.

He could see the General drifting off shore with the wind, the boats of the Oakdale Academy Rifles trailing after her. Means of speedy relief for Larry, had he chosen to avail himself of them, and swim to the nearest boat, leaving poor Bob to his fate.

It is entirely unnecessary for us to state that Larry did nothing of the sort.

"Bob, Bob, Bob!" he shouted. "Where are you? Hold yourself quiet in the water and hollo. I'll save you if I can!"

Possibly it was the shouting and groaning of the rival students which prevented Larry's cry from being heard.

At all events there was no answer.

"Man overboard! Help, some one, help!" yelled Larry, swimming frantically about, looking this way and that, but seeing nothing of his former friend.

"God help him! I'm afraid he's gone!" breathed Larry, hoarsely. "What shall I do? I can get to the shore any time. If I go for help Bob may drown, and—ah! What was that?"

"Larry! Larry! Save me! Save me!"

It was from away off to the left, in the direction of the island and that cry reached his ears.

Without pausing even to call again for help, the brave fellow, utterly regardless of any possible danger to himself, threw all the strength he possessed into a powerful side stroke, forcing himself rapidly ahead.

"Bob! Bob! are you there?" he called, as he found himself nearing a dark object.

Strange enough, there was no answer.

Yet, in less than a moment, Larry was able to make out the dark object to be nothing less than Bob Fuller's head.

The poor fellow was clinging desperately to a floating log

"Bob! Why don't you answer me? I'll be with you in a second. Hold on! Hold— Great Heavens! He is gone!"

Instinctively Larry seemed to comprehend the situation, and without the slightest hesitation sprang upward, turned a half somersault and disappeared beneath the surface of the lake.

When, a moment later, the brave fellow came to the surface again, his left hand clutched Bob Fuller's neck, holding the drowning boy from him at arm's length, while shouting for help with all the strength of his lungs.

But for a most fortunate occurrence it is altogether doubtful whether Larry would have succeeded in accomplishing his purpose, for Bob, now recovered from his fainting spell, was struggling viciously.

Indeed, he was about ready to give up in despair, when just at that instant the sound of oars was heard behind him, and his ears met an answer to his cry:

"What is the row over there?"

Larry recognized the voice instantly.

It was Ben Spurr.

At the first sign of trouble the cowardly fellow had deserted his companions on the General, and, leaping into one of the boats, cast off the line and started for the island with all possible speed.

"It is Bob! He is drowning!" shouted Larry. "Quick! quick! Ben Spurr, if you want to save his life!"

Ben pulled the boat alongside immediately, and with Larry's help Bob was drawn almost unconscious into the boat.

"Ain't you going to get in yourself?" growled Ben, surlily, as Larry began swimming away.

"Not much! I wouldn't disgrace myself by sitting in the same boat with a liar like you, Ben Spurr," was Larry's sole response.

And, throwing himself upon his side, he coolly struck for the shore.

The Fullerites upon discovering that Bob was actually not to be found on board the steamer, had hastened to take to the boats and leave her to her fate.

When last seen, the General was drifting helplessly over toward the woods on the Oakdale shore of the lake.

As for the Danaites, nothing had been seen of them at all.

Of course there was great rejoicing over the rescue of their leader, and the next day at noon Company B broke camp and returned to Oakdale without having ascertained the fate of the General, which was nowhere to be seen when morning dawned.

It was a glorious day, and all Oakdale turned out to greet them.

As the little company marched through Main street in their handsome gray uniforms and helmets, with drums beating and flags flying, half the population turned out to welcome them, which was quite the proper thing to do, seeing that Captain Bob's father owned the town.

The street was fairly lined with people.

Pretty girls filled the windows, waving their handkerchiefs, while men, women and children crowded each other at the curb, shouting themselves hoarse.

Bob, who was expecting a most unmerciful lecture from his father, if nothing worse, felt his spirits rise at all this friendly demonstration, when suddenly a man darted out from among the crowd, and planted himself directly in front of the moving line.

Bob felt his heart leap into his throat.

The man was Captain Coats, the constable.

"I'm very sorry, Bob," he said, as the captain of the Company B gave the command to halt, "but you'll have to come with me. I've been watching for you all the morning. General Dana has been before the magistrate, and made a charge of piracy against you, and I hold a warrant for your arrest."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF THE GENERAL.

Larry White, after refusing the proffered assistance of Ben Spurr, turned his back on the boat, as we have seen, and struck out boldly for the wharf.

He had no difficulty in reaching it.

The boy was a perfect water-dog, and quite as much at home in the lake as he was on it, which is saying a great deal.

The wharf was apparently deserted as he swam alongside. Clambering up to the top by aid of a little stationary ladder used for boarding small boats, Larry shook himself free of such surplus water as he could, and all wet and dripping started for Mrs. Montgomery's boathouse, where the Danaites, amid much shouting and confusion, were trying to launch a leaky long boat, which had not seen service in months.

"Joe! Joe! Hold up a moment! I'm coming!" he called aloud, as he ran.

"Larry, at last!" cried Joe Dana, suspending operations on the long boat for the time being. "Now we'll know something about this business. I thought Larry hadn't turned traitor, as some of you fellows suggested. He isn't one of that kind."

It did not take Larry long to tell his story.

By the time he had finished he found himself a hero.

"By thunder! I wish I'd been with you," cried Joe Dana. "It's a downright shame, that's what it is. If we'd only been a minute sooner and got on board the General, we'd have shown the Fullerites what we were made of, and—"

"And we'll show 'em yet," said Larry, eagerly. "Bob Fuller will make straight for the camp on Wimble Island. There ain't one of the Academy boys beside him that knows anything about an engine. If we can only manage to overhaul the General we'll give them Jesse yet."

"That's so. We might if it wasn't for this confounded boat."

"What ails the boat?"

"She leaks like a sieve."

"Here, let me tackle her," exclaimed Larry. "Send some one up to Mrs. Montgomery's to tell them there will be no excursion to-night, and we'll start at once. I'll manage to keep the old tub afloat."

It was done.

Ten minutes later and the leaky long boat shot out upon the lake pulled by Joe Dana, Hen Ricker, George Moore, and three other of the Institute fellows, while Larry, seated in the stern, did double duty as coxswain and chief bailer of the wretched craft.

It was all they could do.

The boat could carry no greater load in safety, and, much against his will, Joe Dana had been obliged to leave the larger part of his force behind.

"I tell you what it is, father will be as mad as a hornet when he hears about this," said Joe, as they pulled along. "The General cost a pile of money, and if anything happens to her there'll be the tallest kind of a row between him and old Fuller. He'll make it hot for them, you can just bet."

"Well, I shan't blame him," answered Larry, bailing vigorously. "All I hope is he won't blame me."

"I don't see how he can, Larry. You did your best."

"I tried to, Joe."

"I'm sure of it. Where's the steamer now? Can you see anything of her?"

"She's drifting over toward the Hen and Chickens."

"You don't say so. She'll go on the rocks as sure as fate. Those fellows are a-pack of fools."

"I don't more than half believe they are still on board," said Larry, after peering off upon the lake intently for a few moments. "I can't make out any figures moving about on deck, and I ought behind the lights."

"Oh, no. It's too far. You couldn't see them even if they were there."

"I saw them just before we started. Hello! What's the matter now?"

"What is it?" asked Joe, turning on his oar.

"The lights have all gone out."

"By gracious! So they have. I can't see the steamer anywhere."

Larry was greatly perplexed.

There was a mystery about the sudden extinguishing of the steamer's lights that he failed to understand.

The wind had now increased to a gale, and the night grown darker than ever.

It was all the young engineer could manage to keep the boat bailed out, and for the others, they had their hands full at the oars. Little more was said, therefore, until the group of islands known as the Hen and Chickens hove in sight.

"Have you seen anything of her, Larry?" questioned Joe, looking anxiously behind him.

"Not a thing, Joe, but I thought I heard the noise of her paddles a while ago."

"No, that can't be possible. Without Bob Fuller those fellows would never dare to start her."

"I'm not so sure of that. Ed Topliffe is up to anything once he gets going. It's my opinion that they have run her over to Wimble Island. One thing is certain—she ain't here."

"Perhaps she's drifted behind the Hen and Chickens."

"Pull around and we'll soon see," answered Larry, "and you'd better be as quick as you can about it, for I don't believe I can keep this old tub afloat much longer. It won't do to forget that we've got to get back."

At the risk of their lives the boys covered the distance, skirting the wooded bluffs for a mile and more.

They might as well have spared themselves the exertion, for they found nothing of the missing steamer.

By this time the boat had begun to leak so badly that it took two to keep it bailed out.

"They've run her over to Wimble Island," said Joe Dana, at last. "You were right, Larry, and I was wrong. The island is where she is, but we can't follow her in this miserable tub. Some one's going to sweat for this. Come, let's head for the Seven Pines. We've got to be spry about it, too, unless we want to swim the best part of the way."

CHAPTER XVII.

MORE MYSTERY.

"Well, I've fixed him, Joe," said General Dana, as he came stamping down upon the little pier in front of the Hamden Institute, on the afternoon following the loss of the steamer.

Joe and Larry were getting up steam on board the Minnie, while on the pier stood the fair girl for whom the launch was named, surrounded by a crowd of the Institute fellows, each trying to do the agreeable, for Minnie Dana was the admiration of every student in the school.

It had been proposed at first that Larry should accompany the party and take charge of the engine, but just before General Dana started for Oakdale to interview the justice of the peace, Larry came to him and asked to be excused.

"Why, what's the matter?" the general had asked, a good deal surprised.

"I want to go across the lake and explore the Oakdale bluffs," answered Larry. "I don't believe the Academy boys would dare to attempt to run the General through Crooked Pass into the upper lake."

"You don't imagine she's ashore under the bluffs?"

"I don't suppose she can be, sir, or we could see her with a glass."

"Why, bless your soul we don't need a glass, boy, Joe and I were all along the line of the bluffs this morning; don't you suppose we'd have seen the steamer if she had been there?"

"Still I think I had better go, general."

"But I don't understand your reason."

Larry made no answer.

It was quite evident that whatever might be his reason for desiring to make another examination of the bluffs, he proposed to keep it to himself.

General Dana saw this, and raised no further objection.

"Go if you want to, Larry," he said, "but if you must go, I wish you'd postpone your trip until afternoon, and then go in my sailboat and take Minnie with you. She has been just crazy to go over to Oakdale bluffs and gather wild flowers. I promised that some of the boys should take her, but they are mostly poor sailors, and I'd rather trust her with you."

It is wholly unnecessary to state that Larry assented with readiness.

Notwithstanding the difference in their social positions, the young engineer was by no means unsusceptible to the charms of Minnie Dana, and he could not imagine any situation more agreeable than to have her as a companion on his trip across the lake.

During the school session which followed Larry could think of nothing else. He longed for the afternoon to come.

It had come now, and as General Dana and the Institute fellows steamed away for Crooked Pass in the launch, Larry assisted Miss Minnie into the pretty sailboat which lay on the opposite side of the little pier.

The day was perfect, and the surface of the lake as calm as a mill pond on a summer's evening.

There was scarce wind enough to fill the sail, in fact, and in the hands of one less skillful than Larry there would have been difficulty in getting the boat across the lake at all.

He was able to accomplish it, however, and in less than an hour they had reached the Oakdale shore.

"Wouldn't it be funny if we were to happen to find the steamer?" said Minnie, as Larry brought the boat about.

"It would be just what I want, Miss Minnie, and I don't mind telling you it is just what I expect to do."

"But father and Joe were here this morning."

"I know that."

"If the steamer is here they ought to have found her."

"It seems they didn't. The fact is, neither your father nor Joe know Lake Corrina as well as I do. I don't say we shall find the General. I say I hope to—that's all."

"But we can see all the way down the shore as far as Oakdale wharf. It don't seem possible that the steamer can be here, Mr. Larry. I— Oh, there are just the flowers I want

growing on the bank over there! Can't you put me on shore right here?"

"It's the very place I proposed landing," answered Larry, heading the boat for the shore. "And now I want you to excuse me for a few moments, Miss Minnie. While you are gathering the flowers I am going to leave you. I'll be back very soon."

"Where are you going?"

"Ah, that's a secret!"

"But it isn't polite for gentlemen to have a secret where ladies are concerned."

"Stay here a few moments. I may have a surprise for you. I'll explain everything when I return."

And leaving his fair companion among the flowers, Larry hurried away.

He was gone longer than he intended, half an hour having elapsed, in fact, before he returned to the place where he had left the boat.

As he ran along the shore Larry's countenance wore a look of mingled triumph and concern.

To his surprise Minnie Dana was nowhere visible.

The boat was gone, too, and in its stead Larry beheld, drawn up upon the sand, a smaller craft, which he instantly recognized as belonging to the Fullerites.

What could it mean?

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOB FULLER GOES IN SEARCH OF THE GENERAL.

"Halt!" cried Bob Fuller, as he comprehended the meaning of the words addressed to him by the constable.

He might as well have ordered them to break ranks, for all discipline was at an end in an instant, and Company B, breaking ranks without waiting for orders, pressed about the constable in great indignation.

"It's a shame!" shouted Ed Topliffe.

"Might have waited until we had got to the academy," added Ed Gardner. "Bob ain't a tramp. He can be found when he's wanted, I guess."

"Three groans for Captain Coats!" yelled a voice from the crowd, and the groans were given with a hearty earnestness that showed just how everybody felt.

"Run him through, you fellers. You've got bayonets. What good are you if you can't fight?" roared a voice from the throng which had now gathered about the young soldiers.

It was bad advice, but it might have been followed had not Colonel Fuller at the same instant elbowed his way to the scene of action.

"Bob, what does all this mean?" the great man of Oakdale demanded, angrily. "Captain Coats, are you aware that you are interfering with my son?"

"Beg pardon, colonel, but, you see——"

"He says he's got a warrant for my arrest, father, but he hasn't taken the trouble to show it, and——"

Both Bob and the constable began their explanations together, which resulted in confusion worse confounded.

Colonel Fuller stopped them with an impatient gesture of the hand.

"Stop—stop! I can't understand a word either of you are saying when you both talk together. Coats what's the charge against my son? Speak up, man! If you've interfered with him without good cause, by ginger! you shall suffer for it—don't you forget that."

"I am doing my duty, Colonel Fuller," answered the constable, sulkily. "Your boy has been up to mischief. He and them young rascals turned the steamer General loose last night on the lake as she lay at Mrs. Montgomery's wharf, and now she can't be found nowhere."

"Who? you old idiot!" roared the colonel. "Mrs. Montgomery? You don't mean to insinuate that my boy has made way with the old hag."

"Softly, softly, colonel. There's more flies ketched with 'lasses than there is with vinegar. You know well enough that I mean the steamer, not Mrs. Montgomery. She can't be found nowhere, and General Dana has sworn out a warrant agin your boy for piracy, that's all."

"Pish! Pshaw! Nonsense!" blustered Colonel Fuller. "Bob a pirate! Why, it's perfectly ridiculous. Come here, you red-handed ship stealer, and tell me what you have been about."

It was hard to tell whether the colonel was joking or was in a rage in downright earnest.

It was a trying moment for Bob, though, for, in spite of his request to be allowed to explain in private, his father made him tell the whole story of the last night's caper right out be-

fore the assembled crowd. This Colonel Fuller intended, perhaps, for a punishment—perhaps did it from sheer want of thought.

He had, as it happened, heard nothing of the loss of the General, and when Bob told his story—and he told it truthfully, giving no names and blaming only himself—his father saw at a glance that he had become involved in a very serious affair.

"And you have no idea what became of the steamer after the boys deserted her?" he questioned.

"None whatever," answered Bob. "She was drifting off toward the Hen and Chickens when they took to the boats. As for myself, I didn't see her after Larry pulled me out of the water, for the fact is, I was just about half dead."

"Confound that Larry White! Am I never going to get out of his debt?" muttered Colonel Fuller. Then aloud:

"See here, Coats, I'll be responsible for your prisoner. Get a boat from my mill, and you and I will go up the lake and look for the steamer, with Bob along with us. Ed Topliffe, take command of Company B and march them back to the Academy at once."

"Waal, look-er-here; I don't know as this thing is reg'lar," demurred the constable. "I suppose I ought, by rights, to take Bob to the lock-up, and——"

"What? You take my son to the lock-up? Try it, Coats, and as sure as I'm a living man I'll oust you from your office if it takes every cent I'm worth. Do as I tell you if you know which side your bread is buttered—now you understand."

Captain Coats yielded, though reluctantly.

To be sure the law was supposed to prevail in Oakdale as well as in the rest of the world, but it was generally understood that Colonel Fuller's will was superior to it, however. The result was what might have been expected.

Company B, under the command of Ed Topliffe, marched back to the Academy tolerably well satisfied that there were stormy times ahead; while Bob Fuller and his father hurried down to the lake shore and boarded the small boat which Captain Coats brought around from the mill.

"Now, then, you young rascal," cried the colonel, as Bob pushed off from the shore, "you'll find that steamer whether she's above water or below it, if you have to keep on hunting for the next five years."

Bob thought it wiser to make no reply, and the boat shot down the shore headed for the very spot where Larry landed a few moments later on.

The distance was soon covered.

As the boat rounded a little point and came in sight of the place where Larry had left Minnie Dana to gather wild flowers, the stillness was suddenly broken by a piercing scream.

"Look! look!" cried Bob, pointing toward the stretch of black beneath the bluffs. "It is a woman struggling between two men. They are trying to force her into a boat."

Colonel Fuller and the constable turned their gaze in the direction indicated.

Close down at the water's edge two rough-looking fellows could be seen dragging a young girl between them toward a sail-boat which had been drawn upon the shore.

"Pull! Pull!" shouted the colonel, as a scream after scream broke from the lips of the terrified girl. "I don't care who she is, she's a woman, and—— By George! they see us! Look! They are making for the top of the bluffs!"

It was precisely as Colonel Fuller had said.

Catching sight of the approaching boat the two ruffians had released their hold upon the shrieking girl, and, running toward the bluffs, now began to scramble up the rocks with all possible haste.

The girl, ceasing her outcry, fell apparently lifeless upon the sand.

Bob and Captain Coats plied their oars vigorously.

"I swan! if it ain't Dana's gal!" exclaimed the latter, as the keel of the skiff grated on the beach. "It is, by Jerusalem! and she's either dead or fainted. What in the world ever brought her over here?"

The two men had by this time succeeded in gaining the top of the bluffs, and disappeared among the trees.

"Follow them, Bob!" shouted Colonel Fuller. "Don't let them escape you. Coats, you go, too, and leave the girl to me."

"But she may be dead."

"No, no, she has only fainted. Be spry, now, both of you. If you can't overhaul them in any other way, you'll be fully justified in shooting them down in their tracks."

And while Colonel Fuller raised the unconscious daughter of his enemy with all possible tenderness, Bob and Captain Coats sprang up the side of the bluff.

CHAPTER XIX.

LARRY'S SECRET.

In all probability there was not a boy in Oakdale who knew Lake Corrina better than Larry White.

To be sure Lake Corrina was "no great shakes alongside of Ontario," as Bob Fuller had once remarked when some one was running down the lake and calling it a one-horse affair; nevertheless, it had a circumference of many miles; and, to quote Bob again, could "fairly hold its own against any of the smaller lakes of New York State, if it was not as big as Erie, Ontario, or Huron."

Proud of his superior knowledge, as most boys under the circumstances naturally would be, Larry felt loth to expose his secrets unless it proved absolutely necessary so to do.

When he left his fair companion among the wild flowers Larry had not expected to be absent more than ten minutes at the most.

Pushing his way through a clump of alders, here growing close down to the water's edge, the boy hurried toward a thickly wooded point just ahead of him, which projected some little distance out into the lake.

Rounding this point, he found himself at once in the midst of a thicket so dense that he could scarce force his way through it.

The bluffs, though still rising to a considerable height above his head, had ceased to present the fortress-like appearance that they did on the other side of the point, but were covered with an almost impenetrable growth of white birch and maple, with horse brier and other brambles between.

Observed from the lake, unless one was close on shore, the line of green seemed unbroken.

Yet when Larry reached a certain point he discovered before him a break in the shore line, a narrow opening of not over thirty feet, almost hidden by the overhanging branches of the trees on either side, and leading back among the hills.

This was Larry's secret.

Probably there were not twenty persons in the town of Oakdale who knew that any such thing had existence; yet at a short distance from its mouth this hidden channel widened out into a broad basin, surrounded on three sides by the bluffs.

Turning abruptly, Larry continued to push his way through the undergrowth at though with some definite purpose in view.

"It must be here," he said aloud. "The Fullerites would never have dared to run it through Crooked Pass without Bob to help them, and I'm as sure as one can be sure of anything that Bob—— By George! I knew I was right! If there ain't the smokestack now!"

Sure enough! There was the smokestack of a small steamer rising above the trees just ahead of him.

Larry had found the General in the hidden basin beneath the bluffs.

But how came the steamer there? That was the question.

Larry felt certain that it was not the work of the Fullerites; and the reader is well aware that he was quite right.

The steamer could never have drifted into the narrow channel, that was certain.

Yet there she lay under the bluffs, resting upon the calm surface of the basin, to all appearances deserted and unharmed.

Some one had made the bow hawser fast to a tree, and as Larry emerged from the undergrowth and came out upon the little beach alongside which the steamer lay, he at once discovered evidences that at least two men had been on the spot, for there were the marks of their feet in the sand.

He could see no one on board the steamer; nor as he paused and listened could he hear a sound.

"I knew it!" muttered the boy, triumphantly. "I was certain that I should find the General here. Well, I've got to give away the secret of my fishing hole now, and it can't be helped; but who brought her in here? That's what beats me."

Larry hurried along the beach.

While the stern of the General as she lay was inaccessible, the port gangway was so close to the shore that he had no difficulty in reaching it without any worse penalty than wetting his feet.

Leaping upward he managed to get hold of the rail and easily climbed on board.

A few moments' hurried search satisfied the boy that he was alone.

There was no one to be discovered in the cabins or on deck, the engine-room was deserted, and the fires beneath the boiler were out.

Yet there was every evidence that some one beside the Fuller-

ites had been on board the steamer, for scattered about the main deck were cigar stumps and several empty bottles.

Larry entered the pantry and store-room and found that both had been thoroughly ransacked.

The wine bin had been opened, too, and a considerable part of its contents abstracted; some one had helped themselves freely to the stock of provisions, and had shown no scruples in the matter of General Dana's private stock of choice cigars.

Leaving the state-room, Larry hurried to the office, where stood a little safe in which General Dana sometimes kept a little money and the books and papers relating to the steamer's affairs.

Here his worst fears were realized, for the safe had been pried open—it was but a cheap affair—and its contents scattered about the floor.

"Whose work is this?" exclaimed the astonished boy in dismay. "But I mustn't stay here wasting time. The steamer must be got out, and I can't do it alone. My! but won't General Dana be wild when he sees this!"

Leaping on shore, Larry hurried back to the place where he had left Minnie and the boat.

As we have seen he found neither the one nor the other.

There was no trace of Minnie Dana's presence, and in the place of the neat little sail-boat in which they had come over from Hamden, a little skiff, which Larry knew to belong to Colonel Fuller, lay up upon the beach.

For an instant he stood staring at the skiff stupidly.

Where was Minnie? What had happened? What—

"W-h-e-e-e-w!"

Away back on the bluff came a shrill whistle.

Then a voice, shouting:

"This way, Cap! This way! There they go! They are making for Otter Creek!"

CHAPTER XX.

A CHASE THROUGH THE WOODS.

Larry in an instant recognized the shouts as being in Bob Fuller's voice.

Whatever had happened to Minnie, Bob then must be in some way concerned in it.

Without pausing to reason further, Larry ran to the bluffs and scrambled to the top.

There was nothing to be seen of Bob, nor had he expected there would be, since the country was thickly wooded hereabouts.

Off in the direction of the "duck hole," in which lay the steamer, Larry could hear a cracking among the underbrush, and, running forward, presently had the satisfaction of seeing Captain Coats, the Oakdale constable, floundering along among the bushes at a little distance in advance.

"That you, Larry?" he exclaimed, as the boy came running up to him. "Lord! how you startled me! Bob Fuller and me is chasing two scoundrels what attacked Minnie Dana, and I'm blest if I didn't think you were one of them when I heard you coming."

"What do you mean?" demanded Larry, in no little terror. "Minnie Dana attacked? Who did it? Who—"

"Hello! By gracious, is that you, Larry?" came Bob's voice, breaking suddenly in upon them. Say, did Minnie Dana come over here with you?"

"Yes, yes. Where is she?"

"Down on the shore with father."

"No, she ain't."

"Then he's taken her home. But look here, Larry, there's no time to be wasted in talking. The scoundrels are right over there, heading for Otter Creek station on the railroad. We must head them off or they'll catch the down train for Peterboro and make their escape."

"Did you see them?"

"Yes, only a minute ago."

"Go for them, boys!" shouted the constable, and all three dashed on through the woods at the top of their speed.

As they ran Bob briefly explained the situation.

"It must be the same fellows that captured the General," cried Larry, in great excitement. "I'd no business to leave Minnie alone. Heavens! I believe I'd die if any harm had come to her."

"I don't believe they had time to injure her," was Bob's answer; "but say, Larry, what about the General? Do you know where she is?"

"Yes, indeed. Down in the duck hole off there to the right."

"You don't mean it?"

"But I do, though, and what's more, the safe has been broken open, and goodness only knows how much money stolen."

"Larry, you don't suppose for an instant that I had any hand in this business?"

"I don't know what to think, Bob."

"Well, don't you think that, for it ain't within miles of the truth. I went back to the island with Ben Spurr, and found all the boys there when I reached it. They took to the boats as soon as they found I was gone."

"You'd no business to attempt to meddle with the steamer in the first place."

"That's so, Larry, but it can't be helped now. Didn't I come near paying for it?"

"And you would if it hadn't—"

"If it hadn't been for you. Speak it out, Larry. I'll admit I owe you my life, and I mean to square accounts with you as soon as this business is settled."

"There's only one way you can square accounts with me, Bob Fuller."

"What do you mean? If father don't do something handsome for you I'll—"

"Hey, boys! There they go! There they go! Head off the scoundrels, for there comes the Peterboro train!"

They had all emerged from the woods now and had come out upon the summit of a treeless hill, at the foot of which stretched a broad meadow, with a small stream running through it and the track of the new railroad lying just beyond.

Captain Coats had gained upon Bob and Larry considerably, and as he shouted the boys caught sight of two roughly-dressed fellows putting across the meadow for all they were worth, heading for Otter Creek station, which lay just across the stream.

Sure enough! As the constable had said there was the down train for Peterboro just coming in sight round the curve.

On dashed the boys in the wake of Captain Coats down the hill.

"We can't ketch 'em! We can't ketch 'em!" panted the constable. "They'll be at the station in two minutes, and that'll settle it. I'm going to blaze away at 'em, boys—here goes!"

"Do you recognize them?" queried Bob, as they ran.

"Don't know 'em from a side of sole leather," answered the constable, "but they'll know me afore I get through with 'em." Bang! Bang!

"Take that, you rascals! Thunder! I've missed! They'll ketch the train."

CHAPTER XXI.

A ROW ALL AROUND.

"What are you doing on my wharf, sir?"

"I labored under the impression that this was a public wharf, sir."

"Then allow me to inform you of your mistake, sir. This wharf is my property. You have no right to tie your boat up here—no right even to cross the wharf without my consent."

"I haven't hitched my boat to your wharf."

"I say you have. Can't I see it—do you think I'm blind?"

"I repeat I have not hitched my boat to your wharf, General Dana," answered Colonel Fuller, struggling to maintain an unruffled exterior; "and as to the matter of your eyesight, it is one of perfect indifference to me. To be frank, I don't care whether you are blind or not."

"What's that? Do you mean to insult me?" roared the general. "I'd have you to understand, sir, that my eyesight is as good as yours, sir. I—"

"It ain't good enough to permit you to know your own property, then. The boat I hitched to this wharf was your own, not mine, General Dana, and—"

"What, what! Your brat of a boy stole my steamer, and not satisfied with that you try to steal my boat. I'll have you to understand that there's going to be trouble about—"

"But permit me to explain, my dear sir," began the colonel, his face flushing and his voice rising to a higher key. "I took your boat because—"

"There's no because about it. I won't admit it! Zounds, man! Do you think I am going to permit you to handle my property as pleases you! Not much. I'll go before the magistrate and have a warrant sworn out against you for stealing! I'll go—"

"Oh, go to blazes and get your warrants, you stupid old idiot!" bellowed Colonel Fuller, giving way to his temper completely at last. "You haven't got brains enough to last you

over night, and you never did have since the first day I knew you, Dana! Better start an idiot asylum over here in Hamden instead of an academy. It's needed a plagued sight more."

"You call me an idiot!" foamed the general. "Fuller, we ain't either one of us as young as we used to be, but I can lick you, and, by Heavens, I'm going to do it, too!"

"Keep off—keep off, Dana! I thrashed you once forty years ago, when we were at school together, and— Great scissors! this is too absurd! If there ain't Bob and your lout of a son lambasting each other like professional sluggers at the other end of the wharf. The next time you catch me trying to do a favor for you, Dana, you'll catch a weasel asleep. Come on, you old fool! Those boys will hurt each other if we don't look out."

And without stopping to see whether his enemy was following him or not, Colonel Fuller rushed out to the end of the Hamden wharf, where, as he had said, Bob and Joe Dana could be seen engaged in a lively mill with the Institute fellows as audience, and Larry White for referee.

Before Colonel Fuller could reach the combatants Bob had planted a stinging blow between Joe Dana's eyes, which sent him sprawling upon the planks.

There would have been trouble in an instant, for the Danaites were crowding about Bob, had not the colonel suddenly rushed in and seized his son by the arm.

"Here, here! What's all this about?" he cried, angrily. "Bob, I'm ashamed of you. Can't I turn my back for one instant without your getting into some scrape or other? Dana, take care of your son there, or I won't be responsible for what may happen."

Joe had picked himself up by this time, and was rushing at Bob with all the fury of a maniac, when his father, seizing him by the collar, jerked him violently to one side.

"Fuller, get off my wharf and take your son with you!" he roared. "If you don't, by the eternal I'll pitch you both overboard with my own hands."

It was with the utmost difficulty that Colonel Fuller was able to control himself, but he did it nevertheless.

"Dana," he said, slowly, "I have no desire to remain on your premises a moment longer than I'm obliged to. All I ask is a boat to take me to the other side of the lake. Larry White, I see my boat lying alongside here. How it came here I do not know, but may I ask you to row Bob and myself across to Oakdale?"

And without waiting for Larry's answer, Colonel Fuller jumped into his boat, calling to Bob to do the same.

Larry followed Bob before General Dana could raise a hand to stop him.

Not that he had the least idea of sacrificing himself to Colonel Fuller and his son.

By no means.

Boiling under the insults heaped upon him, Larry was only anxious to get away.

He felt as he pushed off that he had had enough of both the Fullerites and the Danaites to last him for some time to come.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TALKING ROCK AGAIN.

Not until the boat was well away from the wharf did either of its occupants speak a word.

"Now, then, Bob, what has happened?" demanded Colonel Fuller at last, as the irate gentleman ceased to shout insulting epithets after them, and could be seen moving up the wharf, followed by Joe and the students of the Hamden school. "Not for a thousand dollars would I have had this happen. Dana is an ass, but I knew that years ago, and upon my soul, I'm a bigger one for attempting to show kindness to one of his brood, as I did."

"Minnie Dana is all right, is she not, colonel?" inquired Larry, anxiously, before Bob had a chance to speak.

"Yes, yes. There is nothing wrong with the girl, so far as I know. I saw her home and safe in her mother's arms before I left her, as I would have explained to that idiot if he would only have given me a chance to speak. But I don't want to talk with you now, Larry. Bob and I have a reckoning to settle. What brought you back, you young imp of mischief? Where's Coats? Did you catch those scoundrels, or did you turn tail and run away?"

"We didn't catch them, but we saw them," replied Bob sullenly. "Captain Coats fired at them and missed them. They got the down train for Peterboro at Otter Creek station and we got left."

"How came Larry with you?"

"He came over with Minnie Dana. Coats and I met him on the bluff."

"And Coats, what became of him?"

"He hired a team and has gone to Peterboro."

"He did just right. Who were those fellows? Do you know them?"

"No, I don't. Larry can tell you more about them than I can, and about the steamer, too."

"What! Have you found the steamer?" exclaimed Colonel Fuller in surprise.

Larry explained, leaving the colonel more mystified than even before.

In answer to his father's inquiries Bob explained that by the advice of Captain Coats they had taken the boat and hurried to Hamden to notify General Dana of the finding of his steamer.

Landing at the wharf they had encountered Joe and the Danaites, who immediately began pitching into Bob in the most violent manner about the attack on the steamer the night before.

The result had been the fight between Joe and Bob as we have seen.

"Now, understand me once and for all," said the colonel, most savagely, when late that night he presented himself at the door of the room occupied by his son. "If you don't name the boy who was at the bottom of that attack on the steamer I'll expel you publicly before the whole Academy to-morrow morning, and you shall be packed off to some other boarding school forthwith."

Thereupon Colonel Fuller slammed the door violently and retired to his own room.

Betray a companion?

Not a bit of it!

Bob had no notion of exposing Ben Spurr, who, after all said and done, he looked upon as but little more to blame than himself.

Then and there Bob Fuller resolved to leave his father's house that night.

Gathering together a few clothes and such little money as he was possessed of, he waited until the clock struck twelve, and then quietly stole downstairs.

As he passed his father's little office, which opened upon the main hall, where a light was kept burning all night, Bob noticed that the keys of the Oakdale bank were not in their usual position upon the nail above Colonel Fuller's desk.

Now Colonel Fuller was president of the Oakdale bank, and was very particular about these keys.

At the time Bob thought but little of the absence of the bank keys.

He was too angry, too indignant to think of anything.

The circumstance was, however, destined to be brought most forcibly to his mind before many hours had passed.

That night Bob Fuller tramped all the way to Downingtown and slept in the Merchants' Hotel.

At the outset he had formed the plan of going to New York to seek his fortune, and he might have done this had not thoughts of his mother and sister constrained him.

After some reflection, however, he determined to remain quietly at the hotel for a day or two, until matters had time to shape themselves.

Not wishing to be subjected to the curious questioning of his friends at Downingtown Bob arose early, hired a boat, provided himself with lines and bait, and started for a day's fishing on the lake.

The weather was delightful, and Bob enjoyed the freedom from the usual school routine immensely.

Perch, sunfish and shiner were attracted to his hook, and by four o'clock he began to think of returning, when it all at once occurred to him that before doing so it would be a good idea to have a swim.

He was then off the little cove under the rocks below Five Mile Reach, the precise spot where Larry had bathed on the memorable day of the pony race the fall before.

Bob pulled for the cove, and finding the shore deserted, stripped, plunged into the lake and swam about for full fifteen minutes, gaining the sandy beach at last much refreshed.

When he began to dress himself he chose a spot where the sun shone brightly, and, as luck would have it, this spot was alongside the "Talking Rock."

Bob had already donned his shirt and trousers, and was in the act of buttoning his vest, when, suddenly, a loud laugh broke upon his ear.

"I say yes," he heard a muffled voice exclaim, as though coming from the rock beside which he stood; "we've worked Fuller, and now we'll work old Dana. There can be no better time than to-night."

Bob Fuller stared about him in amazement. There was not a soul to be seen anywhere. All at once Bob remembered the legend of the "Talking Rock."

Hurrying back he pressed his ear against the ledge.

There was some one talking, that was certain.

"M—um—um—um," he could hear a voice mumble, when all at once its tones were raised, and these words reached his ear:

"Half-past one, you say? O. K. At half-past one to-night we'll crack the Hamden Bank. Now, then, boys, another drink, and we'll turn in and have a snooze, for we'll want to start early, and be fresh when we get ready to make a move."

"M—um—um—um," answered another voice in tones too low to be distinguished.

Then all was still.

For many moments Bob Fuller remained with his ear pressed to the Talking Rock, but without hearing another sound.

"What can it mean!" he exclaimed, half aloud, at last. "There is somebody inside there—somebody plotting to rob the Hamden Bank, and—Larry! You!"

Hearing a step behind him, Bob had turned abruptly.

To his astonishment he found himself face to face with Larry White.

He could scarce believe his eyes.

Larry one of the plotters?

It seemed impossible.

Indeed, Larry's first words showed Bob that even in his momentary suspicion he had wronged the boy.

"Oh, Bob!" he exclaimed, hurrying toward him, "I'm so glad I've found you. The Oakdale Bank was robbed last night, and every one is talking about you as though you were a thief!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHERE ARE THE BOATS?

"Oakdale bank robbed! Folks talking about me! Larry White, what on earth do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Bob," replied Larry, earnestly. "Thieves broke in last night and opened the vault. When Mr. Hines went to your father's for the keys this morning they were gone, and—"

"The keys!" gasped Bob, "by gracious! Larry, I can swear that the bank keys were not in their usual place last night."

"You can?"

"Indeed, I can. When I left the house just after midnight I noticed that."

"You ought to have told your father at once, Bob."

"I see it now; but say, Larry, tell me all about it? You've taken all the starch out of me already, and I want to know the worst. How in the world any one can accuse me of having anything to do with the affair is more than I can understand."

"It's because you ran away, Bob. How in the world did you ever come to think of such a thing?"

"I was mad, Larry. My father didn't use me right."

"Even so, you ought not to have done it, for that's just what set folks to talking. You see the bank door was opened with the keys and so was the outer door of the vault. Now when it was found that you were gone and the keys too—"

"Great Heavens, Larry! you don't mean to say that father suspects me of robbing the bank?"

"I'm afraid it was he who started the talk, Bob. They say he was tearing mad when he found you missing this morning; and when they came up to the house to tell him about the bank he raved like a maniac and swore that you had had a hand in the affair."

"He did, did he," repeated Bob, slowly, his face pale with rage. "So much for trying to do one's duty, and all because I would not give away that miserable Ben Spurr about the steamboat affair. I wouldn't have believed that father could have been so unjust."

Even as he spoke the confused murmur of voices met his ear again, but only for a moment. Then all was still.

"There can't be any doubt about its being the robbers, Bob," breathed Larry, in great excitement. "What in the world are we going to do?"

"I'm sure I can't tell. They are inside here somewhere, and if we don't do something they will serve old Dana's bank just as they served ours last night."

"No, they won't. We can head them off. If they don't intend to begin operations before half-past one, we've lots of time. I think we ought to go to Downingtown at once and get

help. At least one of us ought to go; the other might stay here and watch."

"But we are unarmed. Suppose they came out? What could either of us do alone?"

"I'll bet you what you like it's those two fellows that took the General into the duck hole, Bob."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Have you seen Captain Coats? Did he catch them?"

"I haven't seen him, but I know he didn't catch them. They gave him the slip somehow. When he got to Peterboro they could not be found."

"Look here, we've got to do something?" whispered Bob, after a moment's pause. "Everything depends upon us. Larry, you'll stand by me in whatever happens to-night?"

"Of course I will."

"Then I'll tell you what we'll do. First of all we must get up these rocks somehow, and try and find out the entrance to the cave. Then, while I go to Downingtown in my boat and try and get help you hurry to Hamden in yours, and tell General Dana all about it. There's no other way."

"But hadn't we better start at once?" demurred Larry. "We'll only lose time looking for the cave."

"No, no! I'm bound to find it, for then I can bring help by land and save lots of time. Come, there must be some way to get upon these bluffs, if we can only find it out."

"I'm with you in whatever you do, Bob, and you know it," answered Larry, and together they hurried down upon the beach.

It was getting dark now, but there was still light enough for the boys to see distinctly the line of frowning cliffs before them.

They were at least a hundred feet high, and almost perpendicular, and appeared at first glance to be entirely inaccessible.

"We can never climb them," whispered Larry. "The only place we can get up is over by the woods beyond the Five Mile Reach, and— Hold on! Do you see that?"

It was a thin column of smoke ascending from a point just above the Talking Rock.

"They've lighted a fire!" breathed Bob. "The scoundrels are inside some cave there, Larry. If we could only find the entrance— Ah! What's this?"

They had rounded a projection in the cliffs now, and had come suddenly upon a place where the bluffs were broken, and where with hard climbing it might be possible to ascend to the point where the smoke seemed to leave the rock.

"I can get up there," said Larry, springing forward.

He was followed by Bob, and together they scrambled up the rocks making as little noise as possible, at last gaining a narrow, projecting level under the cliffs, at a length of about twenty feet from the beach.

To walk over to the top of the Talking Rock was now a comparatively easy matter, and in a few moments the boys stood beside the thin column of ascending smoke.

It seemed to find its way out of a narrow fissure in the rock, proving more conclusively than ever the existence of a cave beneath.

"There must be an opening here somewhere," whispered Bob, "but I'll be blest if I can see it. Let's listen there, Larry. Perhaps they are talking, and we may hear more of their plans."

Stooping down, the boys pressed their ears to the fissure.

They could hear nothing, however, nor did they succeed after the most careful search in discovering the entrance to the cave.

It was getting darker and darker, too, and even to Bob it was becoming evident that they were only wasting time.

"We'll have to give it up," he said at last, "or we'll break our necks getting down over these rocks. Come, Larry, let's get out of this. I'm off for Downingtown, and you must start for Hamden at once."

"That's what we ought to have done in the first place," answered Larry, picking his way toward the descent. Bob followed.

They gained the beach without much difficulty and hurried back to the cove, where they had left the boats.

Larry still in advance, as he rounded the point of rocks, was heard to give exclamation to a cry of dismay.

"What's the matter?" questioned Bob, hurrying after him.

"The boats! the boats! I can't see them anywhere!"

Both Bob Fuller's boat and that lately pulled by Larry had been left drawn high up on the beach when the boys had started away from the cove. In spite of the darkness, it was easy to see that they were not there now.

Both boats had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"STOP THIEF! STOP THIEF!"

"Now then, who wants to join me?"

"We'll all join you!" shouted a dozen voices in one breath.

"It's almost midnight, and I suppose it's all a piece of folly, but I can't rest, young gentlemen, until I know what has happened to my son."

"We are all with you, Colonel Fuller," spoke the voice of Ed Topliffe from out of the crowd of students assembled in the great hall of the Oakdale Academy. "We are just as anxious about Bob as you are. If he's alive and to be found anywhere about Lake Corrina we'll find him if it takes a year."

"Then get the boats ready, and we'll start at once. Topliffe, you and I will go in the Comet, and I've asked Captain Coats to join us. The moon will give us all the light we want. Where's Ben Spurr? I don't see him with the rest of you? Has he gone to bed?"

"We haven't seen Ben since the close of school, Colonel Fuller," said Ed, advancing, "and the boys think it only right that I should tell you that it was he who was at the bottom of the attack on the steamer—not Bob."

"Indeed! I'm surprised! I would never have believed it possible. Always considered Spurr one of the steady ones. Can it be possible that he has gone off with Bob?"

"I don't believe it for one," was the answer of Ed Topliffe. "Spurr has gone—we can't find him anywhere. It's my belief that he expected to be expelled and has run away."

Lessons that day had been the last thing thought of, and now on the top of all the rest of the mystery came the strange disappearance of Ben Spurr.

"Sam Gardner, you take one boat load and search Wimble Island and the Hen and Chickens," said the colonel, when all was in readiness for a start at last. "Bill Wright can go through Crooked passage to the upper lake, where Ed Topliffe, Coats and myself will shortly follow him. First of all I'm going over to Hamden to see if anything can be learned there."

"There ain't no use in going to Hamden," objected the constable. "The boy ain't there, I know, for I was over to Dana's this afternoon, and——"

"Did you see him?" interrupted Colonel Fuller, springing on board the Comet.

"See him! Of course I didn't see him. Don't you suppose I would have told you if I had?"

"But I mean General Dana."

"Oh! Thought you meant Bob. No; I didn't see the general either. Him and all the boys over at the Institute are working to get the steamer out of that there duck hole. You see the water's fell a bit since the other night. Not much, but just enough to prevent her getting out. They are all over there now, too, and it's my opinion they've got a night's job on their hands. But I say, colonel, why do you ask? You can't want to see Dana unless things is different betwixt you from what they was."

"General Dana called at my house just before supper time, Captain Coats. Unfortunately, I was away."

"Great snakes! You don't mean it? Dana called on you!"

"He did. He wouldn't state his business, and went away without leaving any message. It struck me when I heard of it from Mrs. Fuller, upon my return from Downingtown, that it might be possible he knew something of Bob."

"It's possible, but I don't believe it."

"Anyhow, I'm going to his house the very first thing. Is everything all ready, Ed?"

"All ready, sir."

"Then let her go."

And with Ed Topliffe at the engine, the Comet shot out into the lake.

"I suppose folks will think me cracked for starting off on this expedition at midnight," said the colonel as the launch came alongside of Hamden wharf shortly after one o'clock; "but I can't rest until Bob is found, and something seems to tell me that we've come to the right spot to look for him, for—By gracious, Coats, here comes the General! They've got her off, and I'll bet ten cents Dana's aboard of her, and I can see the Institute fellows crowding her deck. Hope he won't order me off his wharf again. I'm ugly to-night and don't care for another row such as we had yesterday afternoon, for I might say or do something I'd be sorry for later on."

It was just as the colonel had said.

Away in the distance the steamer could be seen moving toward Hamden wharf.

"We'll go up on the street and wait for them," said Colonel Fuller. "Come, Ed, come, Coats. Wish I hadn't got to set foot on his blessed old wharf, but it can't be helped."

And followed by Ed Topliffe and the constable, Colonel Fuller hurried off the wharf and ascended the little hill, which brought him into the square directly in front of the Hamden National Bank.

The distance from the bank to the Institute was not great.

They had about half covered it, when all at once a loud and startling cry rang out behind them upon the still night air.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" shrieked a man in his shirt sleeves, who had dashed out of the door of the bank and stood staring wildly about him.

"There they go! there they go! Stop 'em! Shoot 'em! Kill 'em! Thieves! Murder! Murder! Thieves!"

Colonel Fuller, the constable and Ed Topliffe came to the right-about-face at once.

To their intense amazement they beheld Bob and Larry running across the square at the top of their speed.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

Bob Fuller and Larry White stood upon the shelving beach of the little cove staring at each other in silent dismay.

The boats were gone.

There was no doubt of that, and what was more, some one had taken them, as they had been drawn up entirely too high on the beach to permit the thought of their having gone adrift of themselves.

"Whose work is this?" breathed Bob, peering off on the lake.

"I'll bet you anything it's the burglars," whispered Larry, in answer. "While we were fooling round on the top of the Talking Rock, they have come out of the cave by some secret entrance at the bottom, and have run off with our boats."

"I suppose you are right, but I can't see a sign of them out on the lake can you?"

"No, I can't; but it's too dark to expect to see anything. They have had lots of time while we've been fooling up on the rocks. The only wonder is we didn't hear or see something of them—I can't understand that."

"Larry," whispered Bob, "I think we'd better be getting out of this."

"So do I," said Larry. "Some one has been here—look at those footprints. Next thing we know they'll be going for us. If we are going to do anything to prevent them from carrying out their purpose to-night, Bob, we'd better get to Hamden at once."

"What? And not go to Downingtown?"

"We've got to go to Downingtown, of course, but I don't see any use in stopping there. By the time we get the constable and get back here again, like enough we'll have had our labor for our pains. I vote we walk straight to Hamden and warn General Dana. We can make it by midnight, and the burglars won't begin operations before half-past one."

"By gracious, Larry, I believe you're right. By fooling about with the constable we may miss our chance altogether. Come, let's be off."

Without further parley the boys hurried around the point of rocks and started along the beach on the run toward the place where Larry had descended on the day of the pony race the preceding fall.

"Larry, do you know what I was thinking about?" said Bob, after some moments of silence.

"No, what?" demanded Larry, without slackening his pace.

"I was thinking that somehow you and I seem to be necessary to each other. If we hadn't quarreled all this wouldn't have happened, for I can't help thinking that there must be some connection between the taking of the General into the duck hole and the robbing of father's bank."

"I don't know, Bob, I don't understand any of it. Who took the steamer after the academy boys left it? If it was the two chaps we chased how came they to be on hand just at that particular time? That's what I can't understand."

"Nor I either; and the worst part of it is that it was all my fault. I ought never to have listened to Ben Spurr when he proposed the attack on the steamer in the first place."

"Ben's a mean fellow, Bob. I've known that this long time."

"I begin to believe it; do you know he was the first one to desert us after getting up the scheme himself."

"No! Was he?"

"Yes, he was. That's the way he happened to be on hand when you saved me from drowning. Larry, I have never even thanked you for what you did for me that night."

"I don't want any thanks, Bob, I only want you to do me justice."

"If I have wronged you, Larry, I am very sorry."

"Indeed you have wronged me. I had no more to do with 'killing' that engine than you had."

"But you brought Joe Dana and the rest up to the cab. You were seen to do it."

"Who says so? I say it's a lie, Bob Fuller. Because your father had a quarrel with General Dana, it is no reason why I should quarrel with Joe. Minnie asked me to find them a place where they could see what was going on and I did it—that's all."

"But Ben Spurr said he saw you and Joe hanging about the locomotive cab."

"Ben Spurr again. I say he lies, Bob!"

"And, by gracious, I believe you, Larry! There's my hand on it. Let's forget all that has passed."

But Larry did not take the proffered hand.

"You can't make up with me, Bob, just because I happened to save your life," he said, proudly. "Unless you really believe me matters had better remain between us just as they are."

"Larry, I do believe you. I'll swear to it if you want me to. Shake hands, old fellow, and let's make up."

Larry could resist no longer.

They had reached the beginning of the path up the bluffs by this time, and before commencing the ascent the two boys stopped for an instant and shook each other warmly by the hand.

"Now, then, for Hamden!" cried Bob, springing up the path enthusiastically. "If we can only bring about the capture of these fellows, Larry, you and I will be the lions of the town."

Upon reaching the top of the bluffs the boys hurried to Downingtown, reaching that place at the very time Colonel Fuller was making such anxious inquiries about his son.

"Shall we hire a team?" asked Bob.

"What's the use? It will cost a good deal, and we can walk just as well as not."

"We'd make better time."

"True, but we've got time enough, and to spare. I feel just like walking, but it's just as you say."

"Well, I haven't got much money, and I may want it all before I get through," said Bob, doubtfully.

"Why, ain't you going home?"

"Not unless my father makes me an apology."

"I think you are making a mistake."

"I don't agree with you, but we won't hire the team. We can make Hamden by midnight, and that's plenty time enough."

And without meeting any one who knew them, the boys hurried through the town and set out upon their long walk down to Hamden road.

"Had we better go directly up to the house first and warn old Dana?" questioned Bob, wearily.

"Suppose we take a turn round the bank first, and see what we find."

"All right. The burglars may have got here ahead of time, though I don't believe it."

The bank building, a low, one-story structure, stood detached from the stores on either side of it with a strip of ground between.

Separating this ground from the street was a low, iron fence, over which the boys noiselessly stepped, and stole cautiously along toward the rear of the bank.

They had scarce advanced ten steps when two men sprang suddenly from behind the building, and came dashing toward them.

They were the men whom they had chased through the woods to the station at Otter Creek!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RIVAL MAGNATES MEET AGAIN.

"Say, father, don't you think you've been a bit too hasty? Who are you going to get to run the engine of the General now that you have driven off Larry White?"

"Mind your business, Joe. I can hire all the engineers I want. What do you mean by getting into a fist fight with Bob Fuller? I should think you'd have better sense than to dirty your hands with such scum."

"What do you mean by getting into a word fight with Colonel Fuller?" retorted Joe Dana, impudently. "I should think you'd have better sense than to dirty your mouth with such scum."

And while the magnate of Hamden and his hopeful son were bickering on the wharf, the Institute fellows laughed among themselves at the discomfiture of their patron, and the boat containing Colonel Fuller, Bob and Larry continued on its way across the lake.

There is no folly so foolish as the folly of a pigheaded man.

Never since the first day of their quarrel had General Dana missed a better opportunity to make it up with his rival than on Hamden wharf that night.

As has been seen he failed to do so.

The result was that when he returned to the house and learned from Minnie's own lips how gallantly Colonel Fuller had acted, he felt heartily ashamed of the part he had taken, and would have given much to have recalled his harsh and bitter words.

The fact was both the general and the colonel were getting tired of their quarrel.

"Why don't you write him a letter, husband, and try and heal the breach between you?" suggested Mrs. Dana. "You'll never have a better chance."

"Oh, I don't like to do that. It wouldn't look well in a man of my standing."

"I think you owe him something for the kindness he has shown Minnie. Your quarrel never had any real foundation, anyway. It began the time Colonel Fuller bought that pair of bay horses on which your mind was set, if I remember aright."

"Do, father!" pleaded Minnie. "Make up with him for my sake, and don't be too hard on poor Larry, either, for I'm sure he was not to blame in leaving me. Neither of us had the slightest thought of danger, you know."

"Well, well, you women would wheedle a man into anything. I'll see about it," had been the general's reply.

The next morning brought Captain Coats to the Dana mansion with the story of the bank robbery and full information about the steamer, whose whereabouts had been communicated to him by Larry the afternoon before.

The constable's news created a profound sensation.

The Oakdale Bank robbed! General Dana exclaimed. "By thunder that's a calamity. I wonder if it will cripple Fuller? I've a great mind to go over——"

The general stopped.

Captain Coats could not refrain from a smile.

"I would if I were you," he said. "In a case like this bank presidents should pull together. It's my belief that them fellows what I chased to Peterboro is the bank robbers, and that they broke open your safe on the steamer, too. Next thing they'll tackle the Hamden Bank if they ain't tripped up."

"I'll go," said the general, abruptly.

And just at evening he did go to Oakdale—went so far as to ring his enemy's doorbell with a neat apology on the end of his tongue.

Unfortunately for the peace of Oakdale, however, Colonel Fuller chanced to be out.

It was a pity.

But the fates had willed it that the differences between Colonel Fuller and General Dana should not be adjusted just then.

Meanwhile the general had been busy over the steamer.

A holiday was proclaimed at the Institute, and headed by Joe, the students, with scarce an exception, repaired to the duck hole to attempt to get the steamer out.

This, however, proved a more difficult task than was first supposed.

The entrance to the basin, as we have seen, was by a narrow channel, with just water enough, when the lake was at its highest, to float the steamer.

From some unexplained cause the water had fallen slightly during the brief space following the capture of the General, and as ill-luck would have it, in attempting to run her out, she stuck fast in the mud.

"Send for Larry, father!" said Joe, when it became evident that there was no moving the steamer. "He is the best hand in an emergency there is on Lake Corrina. If he can't help us no one can."

"Send for your grandmother! I'll send for no one!" sputtered General Dana. "If I can't manage this affair, I'll eat my head."

He did manage it, but it took him half the night to do it.

After all sorts of ineffectual attempts, General Dana announced that he was going up to Oakdale and bade the boys await his return.

Part of his business was to call on his rival; the rest was to buy a number of empty barrels, and engage the services of a boat builder of his acquaintance.

Failing in the first, he succeeded in the second.

The barrels being brought to the duck hole, were attached to the steamer, and served to raise her considerably.

Shortly after midnight the General was afloat.

Joe was in the pilot-house when this happy event occurred, and his father stood beside him.

Tom Joslin, who had been under Larry's instruction, was in the engine room, and in response to Joe's signal pulled the lever, the paddles turned, and the stranded steamer shot through the narrow channel out upon the lake.

"She's off! She's off!" cried Joe triumphantly, as the cheers of the students rent the air. "Now, father, all you want is to get square with the Fullerites, and——"

"I don't know about that, Joseph. I've about made up my mind to let the matter drop."

"What!"

"I've about made up my mind to let the matter drop."

"Then you're a fool," retorted Joe, impudently. "If you do drop it I shan't. The next time I meet Bob Fuller one of us is going to get licked, and you can just bet it won't be me."

To this impertinent speech General Dana made no answer.

The truth told, the great man of Hamden was more completely under his son's control than he had any business to be, and he left the pilot-house without a word and took his station at the bows of the steamer on the deck below.

"Hello!" shouted Joe, as the steamer neared Hamden wharf. "What's the row up in the village?"

There was something unusual going on, that was evident. From the deck General Dana could see men running, while shouts of "Stop thief! Stop thief!" reached his ears.

There seemed to be something going on upon the wharf also.

Several dark figures could be seen struggling.

Then came a cry for help, the figures disappeared, and a moment later a steam launch shot out from behind the wharf headed up the lake.

"Great Heavens, I'm afraid the bank has been broken into!" shouted the general. "Run alongside, Joe! Quick! Give me a chance to jump ashore!"

Joe twisted his wheel and ran the steamer's bows close to the end of the wharf.

Without even stopping to look where he was going, General Dana gave a leap, coming in violent contact, as his feet touched the planks, with a man who at that moment came dashing down the wharf.

There was a sharp exclamation—a tottering backward—a sudden splash.

"Thunder!" gasped Colonel Fuller—for it was he—"I've done it now!"

And sure enough he had.

Jumping almost on top of his enemy, General Dana had staggered back, missed his footing, and went floundering into the lake below.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE EXPLOSION AT THE BANK.

Both Bob Fuller and Larry White had recognized the two men the instant they turned the corner of the bank.

Undoubtedly, they were the fellows who had escaped the constable, and in all probability the scoundrels who had robbed the Oakdale bank.

Upon sight of the boys the burglars stopped, and for an instant were seen to hesitate.

"Hold on, there, you fellows!" shouted Bob, bravely. "Surrender!"

"Stop thief! Murder! Help!" bellowed a voice from behind the bank.

"Out of the way, you meddlesome fool!" whispered the biggest of the pair, hoarsely, at the same time seizing Bob by the shoulders, and slinging him to the ground with a force which threatened to break every bone in his body.

Then, while the other aimed a blow at Larry, which the boy skillfully dodged, both dashed out of the alley, and ran down the street as fast as their legs could carry them away.

The next thing that Bob saw was Larry piking after them.

Then as shouts of "Stop thief!" broke upon the stillness, he scrambled to his feet and ran on.

All at once he heard some one coming behind, and before he had time to think, a man sprang upon him, and he was sprawling on the ground.

"Let me up, you fool!" shouted Bob, angrily. "Let me up, I say! I ain't one of the thieves! They ran down the street. I was chasing them when you threw me down. While you are fooling here they will escape."

"Whist now! Whist now! Don't be after trying to fool me wid no old trick like that. Och! murther! but it's Colonel Fuller's brat, so it is!"

"And here is Colonel Fuller to break your stupid pate!" shouted a voice behind him.

Then the watchman was yanked off Bob so violently that his teeth seemed to fairly rattle, and he found himself between the magnate of Oakdale and Captain Coats.

"Robert! For Heaven's sake, what does this mean!" demanded the colonel in a trembling voice. "It can't be possible that——"

"Father! Don't you dare to intimate it! Larry and I were chasing the burglars. In a moment more we would have caught them if it hadn't been for this fool."

"There! there! son, it's all right. I'm half beside myself, I believe," stammered the colonel, seizing Bob's hand and shaking it warmly. "So much has happened since morning that—which way did they go?"

"Down toward the wharf. Larry and I got on to them and were on our way to give the alarm when——"

"After them!" cried Captain Coats, dashing off down the street. "It's no time for long stories now!"

Before the words were fairly out of the constable's mouth—before he could take a dozen steps—a tremendous explosion rent the air.

It seemed to shake the ground beneath them like an earthquake, and out from behind the bank a thick black smoke shot up.

"Thunder! They've blown up the vault!" gasped the colonel. "There may be more of them inside there. What were you doing, watchman, that this thing could have occurred?"

"Sure, sir, I was at my post!"

"It ain't so!" shouted Bob. "He just said he was away drinking."

"Look to the bank, colonel," called the constable. "I'll follow the thieves."

Leaving the watchman in a half-dazed condition, Colonel Fuller, followed by Ed Topliffe and Bob, now hastened back to the bank.

Running round behind the building they soon discovered that the rear door had been blown to atoms, and that some boxes of papers which stood just inside were in flames.

The vault apparently was intact.

Men by the dozen came running to the scene of the explosion, shouting "thieves" and "fire" at the top of their lungs.

"Come away, boys," whispered the colonel, "Dana must be here presently, and I don't care to meet him. Let's make for the wharf, and see if Larry and Captain Coats have succeeded in capturing the thieves."

And as they ran Bob hurriedly told the story of his adventures at the Talking Rock.

"There ain't a doubt but these fellows are the same who robbed the Oakdale Bank," said the colonel. "My stars! but I hope Coats has overhauled them, and may recover the money! Bob, you have done nobly, but——"

"There comes the General!" exclaimed Ed Topliffe, as they gained the top of the hill leading down to Hamden wharf.

"Where?" said the colonel, looking behind him.

"I mean the steamer, not General Dana," answered Ed. "They are just coming up to the wharf."

"By gracious, so they are! I forgot all about the steamer. Where's Coats? I can't see him anywhere."

"Nor Larry either," put in Bob. "The burglars must have taken some other direction."

"Hold on! There they are! There they are!" cried Ed Topliffe, excitedly. "Don't you see them running out there at the end of the wharf?"

"They are making for their boats!" exclaimed Bob, as two dark figures could be seen moving along at the end of the wharf. "Where can Larry be? After them, father! We may be able to overhaul them if you've got the Comet."

They waited for nothing further.

Dashing down the hill, the colonel in advance, all three made for the end of Hamden wharf.

Meanwhile the steamer was drawing nearer and nearer.

It was just at the moment when Colonel Fuller reached the end of the wharf that his rival leaped down upon him.

The result, as we have already stated, was to send the Hamden magnate floundering into the waters of the lake.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

"Thunder! I've done it now!" was the exclamation of Colonel Fuller as the great man of Hamden fell back over the string-piece at the end of the wharf.

Forgotten now were the bank burglars, and, indeed, nothing had been seen of them by either Ed Topliffe, the colonel or his son since leaving the top of the rise, the attention of all being drawn toward the drowning man.

Drowning! Yes, and he was drowning.

Unable to swim a stroke, the general went down for the second time before any one appeared to get his head.

"Throw him a rope!" shouted voices from the steamer. "Back her, Joe! Back her! he'll be drawn under by the wheels!"

Joe Dana rang the bell furiously, then abandoning the wheel, darted out of the pilot-house and made for the lower deck.

"Help! Help! I'm drowning!" shrieked General Dana from out of the darkness.

"Grab the rope!"

"Jump up and catch the fenders!"

"Keep clear of the wheel there! Keep clear of the wheel!"

"Confound it! They are only making matters worse!" gasped the colonel. "Bob, you mind my coat and hat! Ed, you look to the Comet! I'm going to save Sam Dana's life or lose my own."

And before Bob could raise a finger to stop him Colonel Fuller had thrown aside hat and coat and plunged headlong into the lake.

It was very dark down there alongside the wharf, and the paddles of the moving steamer stirred up the water so that the colonel could not at first make out the precise spot from whence the cries for help proceeded, when suddenly he saw the gray head of his rival just in front of him in the very act of sinking for the last time.

In a twinkling Colonel Fuller had seized the drowning man beneath the chin.

"Keep away from me, Sam!" he shouted, forgetting all animosity in his excitement. "Don't throw your legs about me! There! so! Grab me by the waist. I always said you were a fool not to learn to swim."

Now just how his father managed it, Bob in the darkness and confusion never knew.

The first thing he saw after the colonel's bold leap from the wharf, was the dripping form of General Dana clinging to a rope and being hauled up upon the steamer's deck.

"Confound it all! where's father?" muttered Bob, craning his neck over the stringpiece. "Are they going to leave him there, the ungrateful wretches, to get out the best way——"

"Here, lend me a hand, Bob."

It was Colonel Fuller's voice speaking calmly beneath him.

Looking down Bob saw his father clinging to a spile.

"That's the talk," he said, as Bob threw himself flat upon the planking and, leaning over the stringpiece, reached down his hand. "What in the world did they want to make this wharf so high for? Pah! I'm as wet as a drowned rat. Have you seen anything of the thieves?"

And the colonel shook himself like a water dog as he sprang upon the wharf.

"Dear me, I forgot all about the thieves, father. What in the world made you run such a risk? You are wet through, and——"

"Bah! It's nothing, Bob. I saved Sam Dana, and that's enough! What did the old fool want to jump on me for, I'd like to know?"

"Look—look! There they go!" shouted Ed Topliffe, dashing up at this moment. "They've taken the Comet, and I can't find Larry anywhere, nor Captain Coats, either!"

Sure enough!

Off upon the lake the launch could be seen steaming toward Crooked Pass for all she was worth.

"We must follow in the steamer!" shouted the colonel. "Where the mischief is that idiot Coats? Oh, here he comes now! Coats—Coats! There they go in the Comet! Explain to these fools, will you? Get Dana off the steamer! He's half drowned. We must have her to follow the thieves up the lake without an instant's delay."

Now, to tell just how the constable did it would occupy entirely too much space.

Sufficient is it to say that a few moments later General Dana was brought ashore in a half unconscious condition, and after much confused talk and explanation, Colonel Fuller found himself on board his rival's steamer in hot pursuit of the thieves.

The wharf was crowded with people now, and as his father was certain to receive all the attention his condition demanded, Joe Dana, in a state of high excitement at the news conveyed to him by the constable, had resumed his place at the wheel.

Captain Coats was on board, of course; also Bob and Ed Topliffe, and most of the institute fellows as well.

Though ample opportunity had been afforded him, not a word of thanks did Joe Dana bestow upon Colonel Fuller for having saved his father's life.

"Confound the arrogant young puppy! I'd like to cowhide him," growled the constable, as he found himself standing by the side of Colonel Fuller and Bob at the steamer's bows. "It was a noble action, colonel, and he never said aye, yes nor no."

"Hush!" replied the colonel, quietly. "I want no thanks. About these thieves, Coats. We're bound to overhaul them. Don't you think so?"

"Not unless we move faster than we are doing now," answered the constable. "Drive her ahead there, will you?" he shouted up at the pilot-house. "Confound these fellows! they act like a parcel of idiots. Colonel, hadn't you better go below and wring out your clothes?"

"Leave me alone, Coats, I'm all right. I only wish we had Larry White here. He'd make the feathers fly!"

"I can't imagine what became of Larry," said Bob, anxiously. "I'm afraid some harm has come to him."

"It certainly looks so. Coats, where did you go to? You were ahead of us all, and must have seen Larry chasing the thieves."

"I suppose you'll call me a fool, colonel, but the fact is, I don't see very well. I saw a man running, and I followed him down on the shore. I don't know who he was, but somehow, I managed to lose him, and then——"

"And then you came back to the wharf, I suppose?"

"That was it."

"Well, it can't be helped. Are we gaining on them or not? It seems to me as though we were crawling, and the Comet is no slouch."

"I wish some one would come up here in the pilot-house with me!" shouted Joe Dana at this moment. "I'm a bit near-sighted, and can't attend to the wheel and watch the launch at the same time."

"You go, Bob," whispered his father.

Several of the Institute fellows sprang for the stairway at the same time, but Bob was ahead of them and reached the door of the pilot-house first.

"I don't want but one," snarled Joe, slamming the door in the faces of his companions. "Where's the launch, Bob Fuller? Blest if I can see her anywhere on the lake."

"There—just entering Crooked Pass."

"Faster! Faster! Put on more coal! Do something!" roared Joe, through the tube which connected with the engine room.

"Better bear a little to the starboard," suggested Bob. "You are giving them the advantage of us the way you are heading." Joe twisted his wheel violently.

"Will that do?" he asked.

"That's better."

"Say, Bob."

"What is it?"

"Between you and me I can never navigate among the rocks of Crooked Pass—never in the world."

"But we've got to get through, Joe. See! The launch is just entering it now. Confound it! If it hadn't been for all this delay we might have had those fellows long ago."

"I tell you what you do, Bob."

"What?"

"I don't want the fellows to know I can't manage the steamer. I'd rather you'd know it a blame sight."

"Do you want me to take the wheel? I'll do it willingly."

"I want to overhaul the launch, Bob, but I don't want to give myself away."

"I don't see how you're going to help it, then."

"Suppose you get down on the floor here and turn the wheel from the bottom? I'll pass the word and pretend to be steering, and——"

"I shan't do anything of the sort! You must be a fool to think it. Here, give me that wheel, Joe Dana! If you can't steer the steamer I can."

"No, I won't, either. I'll steer her myself."

"But don't you see the launch is half through the pass now, and we are just entering it?"

"I don't care. I ain't going to make a spectacle of myself."

"But you'll be on the rocks in a minute. Starboard! Starboard! There! What did I tell you! You've done it now! Here's a pretty kettle of fish."

Joe in his blundering confusion had moved the wheel to port instead of starboard, and in the same breath the keel of the General struck upon those ragged ledges which mark the entrance of Crooked Pass.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FAST ON THE ROCKS—COLONEL FULLER RESOLVES "TO PUT HER THROUGH AT ANY COST."

"Stuck on the rocks, by thunder! Was there ever such wretched luck?"

The exclamation was from Colonel Fuller, who, with the constable and Ed Topliffe, had maintained his position at the bow of the General.

It found echo in the heart of every one on board.

"Which of you boys are responsible for this?" shouted the colonel, looking up at the pilot-house, where Bob and Joe Dana could be seen looking about them in silent dismay. "If I couldn't steer better than that I'd be ashamed of myself! Stop her, why don't you? Stop her! She's grinding her keel to powder on the rocks!"

Sping! went the bell in the engine room, and the steamer's paddles ceased to move.

The Comet had by this time progressed more than half the distance through the Crooked Pass.

In a few minutes, if some desperate action was not taken, the launch would unquestionably be driven around Potes' Point, and amid the innumerable wooded islands which marked that part of Lake Corrina, be lost to view.

"Never thought Joe Dana was such a muff at the wheel!" cried Tom Joslin.

"By gracious!" said Hen Ricker, "I don't pretend to know much about steering, but I'll be whipped if I couldn't have done better than that myself."

"Bob Fuller, what in the world are we going to do now?" whispered Joe, aghast.

"You've run her on the rocks, Joe, and now you've got to abide by the consequences."

"But it's just as much your fault as mine, Bob Fuller."

"Upon my word that's cool. I'd like to know how you figure it out?"

"If you'd taken the wheel as I asked you to this thing wouldn't have happened. I told you plain enough that I could not steer through Crooked Pass."

"Do you suppose I'd get down on my knees and work the wheel from the bottom, with you playing dummy at the pilot-house window?" cried Bob, with flashing eyes. "Not much. Here, stand aside. Give me that wheel. Either we've got to get off, or give up all thought of overhauling the thieves."

"What! do you mean to take the wheel from me?" bawled Joe, bursting with rage. "Get out of the pilot-house! I don't want you here! I'm going to back her off the rocks—I can do it. Stand back! Bob Fuller, don't you touch me! I'll break your head if you do!"

Then by those on deck the bells were heard ringing wildly, and to the amazement of all Bob Fuller and Joe Dana were seen "lambasting" each other (the word was of the constable's coining) in the pilot-house above.

"My stars! but this is positively disgraceful!" roared Colonel Fuller, as the steamer instead of backing was started ahead again and crowded harder than ever upon the rocks.

"Robert, quit that and come down here instanter! You are ruining every chance we have left of catching the thieves!"

"Let go of me! Let go of me!" shrieked Joe.

"Take that, you fool!" the voice of Bob was heard to exclaim, and the same instant saw Joe Dana thrown violently away from the wheel while the bell sounded to reverse the engine and drive the steamer back.

"Hey, fellows! He's licking Joe!" yelled George Moore. "To the rescue! To the rescue! Down with the Fullerites! H—a—m—d—e—n!"

It was the rallying cry of the Hamden Institute, and before either Colonel Fuller or the constable could interfere, the Danaites had made a dive for the pilot-house in a body.

Truly Bob had managed to get himself into a bad fix.

Meanwhile the steamer had not moved a peg.

But Bob had not been asleep.

Had he injured Joe seriously.

Probably not.

The son of the great man of Hamden, when Bob had flung him away from the wheel, had managed to strike his head against some portion of the woodwork of the pilot-house, and now lay sprawling upon the floor, blubbering like a great calf.

In an instant Bob had grasped the situation.

He could not get the steamer off, and to maintain his position and fight the Danaites would only be to delay matters until it was too late to catch the thieves.

He, therefore, abandoned the wheel, dashed out of the pilot-house, and made a flying leap to the deck below.

"We must take to the boats!" he cried, before his father had opportunity to say a word. "Captain Coats, I look to you to protect me from these fellows, who seem bound to spoil our game."

"There's a boat in tow," said the constable. "Colonel, the boy is right. We'd better make for it and leave these fools to get their steamer off the best way they can. If we stay there'll only be a row."

It was sound advice, and Colonel Fuller saw it.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "We'll try it, anyhow. It's certainly our only chance."

They were down upon the lower deck and aft before the Danaites could gain the bottom of the pilot-house stairs.

Seizing the tow line, Bob drew up the boat holding it in position, while his father, the constable, and Ed Topliffe, leaped in.

Then jumping over the rail nimbly, he dropped into the boat himself, at the same time casting off the line.

"Come back! come back!" shouted the boys from the deck. "Come back! We won't touch you, Bob. How are we ever going to get out of this if you go off with our boats?"

"The oars, Coats! The oars!" whispered Colonel Fuller. "Don't pay any attention to the fools, Bob. Let them get off the best way they can."

A moment later the boat propelled by the lusty strokes of Captain Coats, Ed and Bob, was seen shooting through the Crooked Pass.

"Do you see anything of the Comet?" questioned the colonel, anxiously. "I'll be whipped if I can."

"Certainly, father. There she is under the trees, just this side of Potes' Point."

"Yes, and they are looking back at us," put in the constable. "Depend upon it they understand the situation. There! Don't you see that fellow at the stern? By Judas, I only wish I had my paws on him—that's all."

"I'm afraid we've made a mistake," said the colonel, gravely. "We can never hope to overhaul the Comet in this tub—never in the world."

"There!" cried the constable, "the Comet has rounded Potes' Point. Two to one those scoundrels will take to the woods, and we'll have our labor for our pains."

"No—no! Don't croak, Coats!" exclaimed Colonel Fuller. "Pull! Pull! I'm resolved to put her through at any cost!"

CHAPTER XXX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

"Where is the Comet?"

It was the general exclamation as the boat shot around Potes' Point.

Where, sure enough?

The launch was to be seen nowhere, but then it was as dark as Egypt here among the woods where the lake was narrow and the many islands intervened.

If the confounded fools had only known what they were about they would have taken the narrow channel on the Oakdale side," remarked the constable. "Two to one they've taken Beaver Tail Channel, or perhaps gone away round Cram's Island. If so there is just a chance that we may be able to head them off."

"One thing is certain, they don't know the lake," said Colonel Fuller, with an air of relief. "There is barely water enough behind Cram's Island to float the Comet; besides, they've given us a tremendous advantage by adopting that course."

"Shall we take the straight channel, then?" asked Bob.

"Certainly," replied his father, "and now, while we have a minute to spare, Robert, I have a few questions I want to ask."

"Say away, father."

Bob wondered what was coming now.

Then the colonel cleared his throat and began:

"Robert."

"Well, sir?"

"Will you tell me who put you up to stealing the steamer from Mrs. Montgomery's wharf the other night?"

For an instant Bob hesitated.

Was there any good reason why he should seek to shelter Ben Spurr any longer?

Apparently there was none.

Ben had proven himself a coward and a mean fellow; still Bob hesitated to betray even the meanest of his schoolmates, especially as he could not but regard himself as quite as much to blame in the affair of the steamer as Ben.

"I'd rather not say, sir."

"You are very stubborn—very," answered his father. "However, it makes no difference since I know the name of the boy already. Robert, any attempt at further concealment on your part will be useless—it was Ben Spurr."

Bob was silent.

"Am I not right?" questioned his father.

"I suppose you are, sir. If the other boys have a mind to split it ain't my fault—"

"Hold on, Bob. It was I who told your father," spoke up Ed Topliffe, honestly. "In my opinion this thing has gone far enough."

"Now, one question more," said the colonel, gravely. "The bank keys, Robert—what do you know of them?"

"Nothing whatever, sir. They were hanging on their usual nail when I left the house last night."

"How came you to notice them?"

"I can't tell you, father, but I did."

"Yet they were gone from the nail this morning," answered Colonel Fuller, musingly "and what is more it was by means of these keys that the Oakdale Bank was robbed. Some one in the Academy must have taken them—"

"That's what I say," interrupted the constable. "It's my opinion—"

"Be quiet, Coats. When I want your opinion I'll ask for it. Bob, do you know—but of course you don't—that Ben Spurr alone of all our boys was missing from the Academy to-night?"

"Father, you don't mean to say—"

"There's the Comet! There's the Comet just coming around Bark Island!" shouted out Ed Topliffe.

"Yes—and by ginger! there's Bill Wright and the other boys coming down the lake!" cried the colonel, as the boat shot out of the narrow channel into the open. "If we could only make them understand, they could head those scoundrels off as slick as you please."

"Boats ahoy—boats ahoy! Head off the Comet! The burglars are on board!" was the cry which rang out upon the still night air.

Was the cry heard?

Indeed it was.

It reached the ears of Bill Wright, and the boys of the Oakdale Academy almost at the instant they perceived the Comet steaming up the lake.

Upon leaving Oakdale wharf Bill Wright had led the way through Crooked Pass, crossed the lake, and started along the Hamden shore.

They had not gone as far as Downingtown, since Colonel Fuller himself had been there only that evening, and a visit on their part seemed unnecessary. Neither had they advanced as far even as the Five Mile Reach, but had crossed the lake somewhat below that point, and were now coming down hugging the Oakdale shore.

But though they heard the cry from Colonel Fuller's boat they failed to understand it.

The distance was too great for them to make out the forms in the boat or to enable them to distinguish words.

Naturally enough they assumed the colonel to be on board the Comet, and took the advancing boat to be the one sent to the Hen and Chickens in command of Sam Gardner in search of Bob.

"What in the world is the Comet doing up here?" exclaimed Bill Wright, peering out upon the lake.

"Blest if I'll ever tell you," answered Hen Blatchford. "But I say, Bill, what are those fellows in that boat trying to give us?"

"I can't make out. They are hollerin' like madmen about something or other."

"It's Sam Gardner and the rest of course. Maybe they've found Bob, and— By gracious! fellows! It's the colonel and Bob himself!"

Too late was the discovery, for at that moment the Comet shot past the line of the boats a good quarter of a mile away on the Hamden side of the lake, and all chance of heading her off vanished like smoke.

"After the launch! After the launch, you fellows!" bellowed Colonel Fuller in dismay. "After her, boys! The burglars are on board!"

Had a ten-pound shot been dropped among the boats it could not have astonished the boys more than did the colonel's cry, which now reached their ears.

In an instant they had grasped the situation, turned their boats about and were pulling up the lake with all the strength of twenty muscular arms.

The launch was heading directly for the cove.

"She'll ground on the shoal water as sure as fate, fellows!" cried Bill, excitedly. "Pull! Pull for your lives!"

"By George, she's struck already," he added. "One of them has sprung out into the water! There goes another—heavens and earth, fellows, look there! look there!"

It was toward a youthful figure standing at the bows of the Comet, hesitating to take the leap which lay before him, that Bill's finger pointed.

In the bright moonlight the boys saw to their amazement that it was none other than Ben Spurr!

CHAPTER XXXI.

LARRY'S ADVENTURES.

But what, meanwhile, had become of Larry?

When Bob Fuller was captured by the bank watchman, Larry kept on running, in hot pursuit of the flying thieves.

Before the burglars had reached the top of the hill leading down to Hamden wharf, Captain Coats had gained upon them considerably.

In the hurried glances cast behind them the thieves seemed to recognize the constable, for now they flew the faster, separating at the top of the hill.

Of course Larry could not chase them both; and while Captain Coats diverged to the right, in hot pursuit of one of the thieves, Larry followed the other down the hill and out upon the wharf.

Every second brought him nearer and nearer. In an instant more his hand would have been upon the man, when all at once out from behind a wood pile, which stood upon the wharf, a dark figure sprang, thrusting its foot in front of Larry and felling him to the ground.

As he fell, his head struck against a stick projecting further from the pile than its fellows.

The blow was a terrible one.

It stunned poor Larry completely.

He lay upon the wharf like a log, and for a considerable time knew no more.

The next thing Larry became conscious of was that he was lying upon a bench, listening to a grinding noise which sounded to him just like the propeller of the Comet, Colonel Fuller's launch.

His head ached horribly, it seemed as though he had been listening to the grinding sound for ages—as if each separate grind were forcing its way into his reeling brain.

He was still trying to collect his scattered senses, when all at once he heard his own name pronounced by a familiar voice which recalled him to himself at once.

"I don't care what you say. I'm going to get square with Larry White."

"Shut up!" was the fierce response. "He may have come to by this time. Attend to your steering, or those fellows will overhaul us yet."

"I'll see whether he has come to or not," spoke the first voice again, and the next instant Larry felt some one bending over him as he lay.

That some one was Ben Spurr!

Before he had started toward him, Larry, cautiously opening his eyes, had recognized his former school fellow.

The recognition fairly took his breath away, but he managed to control himself, and never moved a muscle as Ben bent over him for an instant, and then moved away, remarking:

"By George! I believe you are right, Jim! His head is terribly cut. After all he may be dead."

"I tell you he is dead," answered the second voice. "Didn't I feel his heart and pulse? It was a piece of rank nonsense to bring him aboard the launch with us, but you would have it. If I could have had my way he'd have been left on the wharf."

Just then shouts were heard, and Larry recognized the voice of Colonel Fuller among them.

After that, on board the Comet there was little said, the launch continuing on and on at a high rate of speed.

And Larry?

He was on board the Comet at the mercy of Ben Spurr and his companion, in whom he had already recognized Jim Jowler, one of the most notorious ruffians in the whole region about Corrina Lake.

Was Ben in league with the burglars?

From his conversation there could be no doubt of it.

The next half hour was a trying one for Larry White, but he had taken his resolve.

Come what would, he was determined to stick closer to Ben Spurr than a brother in the hope that he might learn where

the money stolen from the Oakdale Bank was concealed, and be the means of restoring it to Colonel Fuller's hands.

Thus, when the keel of the Comet grated on the pebbly beach at the cove, Larry was not only aware of it, but knew just where they were into the bargain.

He knew also when Jim Jowler leaped overboard, and was just wondering if they intended to abandon him at last, when all at once he felt himself seized—his eyes were closed—and dragged over the side of the launch.

Now came the trial of endurance, and Larry stood it nobly.

He had already determined in his own mind that the entrance to the cave of the Talking Rock must be under the water of the lake, and setting his teeth and holding his breath, he never moved a muscle when he felt the water close above his head.

Ben Spurr had his head and shoulders, Jowler his feet, and thus held Larry felt himself drawn swiftly through the water for the distance of a few steps, when suddenly all was utter darkness, and—plump! Down he dropped upon solid ground.

"I'm in the cave at last," thought the boy. "Now, then, what next?"

Next was the striking of a light by Ben Spurr, and the sound of whispering in low tones.

That both believed him dead now he was well aware from certain remarks which Ben let fall.

"What are we going to do with him?" were the next words which reached his ears.

"Leave him where he is," growled Jim Jowler. "Do you suppose I'm going to bother with him any further? I want you to understand I'm no such fool."

"But it's awful!" breathed Ben, in hollow tones. "I never meant to kill him. I'm sure we shall be hung for murder before we get through with this."

"Shut up, baby! What did you want to engage in this thing for if you were not willing to take your chances?"

"Didn't I take chances enough when I got you the keys of the Oakdale Bank? I'm no baby—I'm ready for anything. Those fellows are right on top of us, and for all we know may track us into the cave. What do you propose to do?"

"To dig up the money, of course, and to escape by the other entrance at the top of the bluff. Never you fear. They won't discover us, or if they should manage to find out how we got in here, long before they can possibly accomplish it we'll be gone."

Then, as their voices died away in the recesses of the cave, Larry ventured to open his eyes.

He was within a low, rocky chamber, which seemed to lead off to a great distance under the bluffs.

For a moment or two he watched the lantern as its light flitted from side to side.

Then springing to his feet, he seized a great stone which he espied upon the ground beside him, and cautiously crept after Ben Spurr and Jim Jowler into the depths of the cave.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ON THE BLUFFS.

"Ben Spurr! No, it can't be!"

"It is Ben!"

"No, it ain't either!"

"Bet you a shilling it is, too!"

Such were the exclamations of Bill Wright and his companions in the boats.

Ben was like the button of a thimble-rigging sharp—now they saw him and now they didn't.

Had he leaped into the water or dropped back into the launch?

It was more than the boys could tell.

All had seen him standing on the rail just as they had seen his companion jump overboard.

The next moment, when they looked for Ben, he wasn't there at all; the next, still, and they thought they saw some one rolling over the Comet's rail into the lake, after which nothing of either Ben or the burglar was to be seen.

"Pull, fellows—pull!" cried Bill. "I'll make directly for the Comet. The rest of you land further up and head them off when they try to climb the bluff."

"What's the use in that?" demurred Harry Lownes, who was acting as stroke of one of the other boats. "Don't you see that cove over there where the Comet lies is right in front of the Talking Rock where Bob says there's a cave? Hold on! There comes the other boat with Bob Fuller, as I live—just turning the point! Colonel Fuller is with them, and he will tell us what to do."

"Tell us what to do!" roared Bill. "I don't want any one

to tell me what to do. If you don't want to take your boat up the lake according to my directions, take it to Ballyhack and be blowed! The other fellows are half way there by this time. Lownes, you're the only kicker of the crowd."

By this time the boat containing Colonel Fuller, Ed Topliffe, Bob and the constable had gained the cove.

"Well, well, well! What have you boys been about?" stormed the great man of Oakdale as he leaped ashore, followed by Bob and the others. "Don't tell me you've let them give you the slip after all."

"Say, Bob," whispered Bill, drawing the leader of the Oakdale Academy to one side, "I've got something to tell you—wanted to tell your father, but he wouldn't let me."

"What is it?"

"Ben Spurr was one of the fellows who stole the Comet."

"Then Ben must be one of the burglars, and I know that ain't so for I saw them both."

"I can't help that. I saw Ben. But say, Bob, we were looking for you everywhere. Where on earth have you been?"

"I can't stop to talk now. Come to father. He must hear this, if I can only manage to get his attention long enough to make him listen."

The colonel was tearing here and there, searching among the rocks for some trace of the thieves, followed by Captain Coats, who seemed to be in the sulks about something as Bob drew near.

"If you would only let a feller say a word, colonel," Bob heard him say, "you might learn something of interest to you in this here emergency. I have tried twice, and you won't hear me out."

"Shut up, Coats! You are always jawing about something. If you've got anything to say, why in thunder don't you say it? Who's hindering you, I'd like to know?"

"I've got something to say, father, and I want you to listen to it, too. Bill Wright says he tried to tell you that one of the fellows he saw land from the Comet was Ben Spurr."

"No!" fairly shouted Colonel Fuller. "No! Don't tell me that!"

"It was, though, colonel," said Bill, seriously. "There ain't the least doubt about its being Ben—not the least in the world."

"And you say you saw Ben and this other fellow jump over the side of the launch and then disappear?"

"I saw the other fellow. I can't swear as to what became of Ben."

"It's my opinion, father, that they have taken to the cave that I'm certain exists somewhere behind these rocks, but you get so excited you won't listen to me, and—"

"Shut up, Robert. Don't tell me that I'm excited. Of course they are in the cave—we all know that—but how the mischief are we going to get in? That's what I'm doing my best to find out."

"Was trying to tell you, but you kept interrupting me," growled the constable.

"Why, you said you didn't know the entrance, Coats. What do you mean by blowing hot and cold in the same breath?"

"Hold up, will you, Colonel Fuller. Gosh almighty, you are so blamed impatient that you don't give a man a show. What I was tryin' to make you understand is that I don't know nothing about no entrance to the cave behind the Talking Rock under the bluffs, but I do know where there's one on top on 'em. I've been in the cave when I was a youngster many's the time."

"Now, by all that's great and good, if you ain't the dumbest old file I ever saw!" stormed Colonel Fuller. "Why in the name of sense, man, didn't you tell us this before?"

"Couldn't get no chance. You want to do all the talking yourself. Now, then, if you'll put this matter in my hands, where you'd ought to have put it in the fust place, I'll soon snake out these fellows. You seem to forget that I'm the constable of Oakdale."

"Get back my money and you shall be mayor!" shouted the colonel. "Lead on, Coats, we'll follow. Good gracious! I hope we haven't talked out loud enough to be heard inside the cave."

"Must be plaguey deaf ef they hain't heard us," muttered the constable.

Then directing five or six of the Academy boys to remain on guard by the side of the Comet, he led the way along the beach for a distance of several rods, coming finally upon a path of the bluffs which Bob had never seen before.

The path was tremendously steep. It wound in and out among the rocks to such an extent that Bob found himself wondering how Captain Coats had ever managed to discover it, when all at once a lantern flashed over head on the top of the bluffs.

"There they go! There they go!" shouted the constable, scrambling up to the level. "After them, boys! Show them no mercy!"

They needed no urging.

Close in the wake of the constable Colonel Fuller and Bob swung themselves upon the top of the bluff.

There were two dark figures to be seen moving about among the trees with a lighted lantern.

Dashing among the bushes, Colonel Fuller, to his extreme amazement, found himself face to face with his old enemy.

It was General Dana and Joe.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RIVAL MAGNATES MAKE IT UP.

"Sam Dana!" ejaculated Colonel Fuller, starting back in astonishment.

"Jim Fuller!" cried General Dana, what in the world brings you here?"

"I'm looking for the burglars who robbed my bank."

"And I'm looking for those who would have robbed mine but for the timely interference of yourself and your noble son."

"Phew!"

Colonel Fuller gave a low whistle, Bob blushed and Joe looked particularly sheepish, while the Academy boys and the Institute fellows too—for there were a dozen of them behind Joe Dana—stared wonderingly on.

"Glad you appreciate Bob's efforts, general," replied Colonel Fuller, quietly. "He only did his duty, and though he's a little wild he generally tries to do that. But I say, if we're going to catch those burglars we've got to be lively. They are concealed in a cave somewhere about here, and we are looking for the entrance. One of the scoundrels it seems turns out to be a pupil at my school in Oakdale. But tell me how is it you are here when I left you all used up on the wharf?"

"We came in the Minnie. I was not so badly used up as I looked. As soon as I changed my clothes I was all right again, and Joe, coming back in one of the steamer's boats, told me all that had happened. We boarded the launch, steamed up the lake, and here we are."

"Yes, but how did you manage to get up on the bluffs? I used to think there was only one path, now it seems there are several. However, I am more than glad to see you all right again."

The colonel's tone was mild and conciliating. All his former harshness of manner toward his rival seemed to have disappeared.

General Dana stepped quickly forward, and passing the lantern to his son, cordially extended his hand.

"Jim," he said, his eyes glistening, "we used to be friends once, now we are enemies, and yet you saved my life to-night at the risk of your own. Will you let by-gones be by-gones, shake hands and make it up?"

"I don't know about that," answered Colonel Fuller, stiffly. "I've got a long account against you Dana. As to saving your life I'd do as much for any one, and——"

"I know I've wronged you, Jim," interrupted the general, in tones singularly mild. "If you won't shake hands I can't insist upon it. For what you have done for me I sincerely thank you. For the kindness you showed my daughter Minnie I also thank you; and now, since we can't renew our old-time friendship, let me make such amends as I can by helping you to recover the money stolen from your bank. Joe, come here."

"Hold on a moment," cried Colonel Fuller, as Joe stepped forward looking very disconsolate. "My son, Bob, here, has been whispering in my ear not to be a stubborn pig any longer. It's very disrespectful of him, I know, but I am so under his thumb that I have to mind him. Sam Dana, there's my hand."

And as the rival magnates shook each other's hands warmly, the Academy boys and the Institute fellows set up an approving shout.

"Now!" exclaimed Colonel Fuller, "Bob must make up, too—what's that you are saying, Coats! You are always sticking your finger in the pie."

"I was only saying, colonel, that while all this business is going on the burglars are probably making off with your money. The cave is——"

"Hold on, constable," interrupted General Dana. "I—that is Joe—can show you one entrance to this cave. If I am not mistaken it is behind that ledge of rocks right in front of where we are standing now. We were just about to enter when you all came along."

"One moment, my friends," said the Hamden magnate. "Before we proceed any further I have a few words to say. It goes hard with me to say it—to speak against my own flesh and blood—but in the interest of truth and justice I must."

"Better leave it unsaid, Sam," whispered Colonel Fuller. "If I get the money back it's all I want. There's no use of lugging your boy into the scrape."

"No," replied the general—"no, it must be done. Joe confessed all to me, and I feel somewhat of selfishness and animosity. Coats, keep your eye on the mouth of the cave, since you know where it is. I want all present to listen to me."

That all did listen, and listen with breathless interest, we need not state.

Joe Dana alone turned his face away and hung his head.

"The case is not quite as bad as you may think," began General Dana. "The trouble commenced on the day of the pony race, when Joe fell in with that thoroughly bad fellow Ben Spurr. Do not press me for details, for I prefer not to give them, but let me simply state that it was Joe who shot Mexican Madge, and that Ben Spurr was a witness to his mean action. It was Joe who planned the attack on Bob and Larry on the launch in the cave behind the Talking Rock. It was Joe, assisted by Ben Spurr, who 'killed' the locomotive on the day your railroad opened, colonel. It was not Joe, but Ben Spurr who planned the robbery of the bank."

"But how on earth did Joe and Ben manage to get in with these fellows?" questioned the colonel. "Surely——"

"One moment," interposed General Dana, laying his hand upon Colonel Fuller's arm. "Don't ask me to be too hard on my boy. It was drinking and idle habits that did it. It seems that Joe and Ben Spurr have been in the habit of meeting two of the most dissolute scamps in Peterboro secretly at night, playing cards for money and all that sort of thing. One of these fellows is the Sam Slade who attacked Bob on the launch, and we now have him in custody over at Hamden. The other is one Jim Jowler, whom I believe to be in the cave with Ben Spurr."

"Can it be possible?" questioned Colonel Fuller. "My boys leaving the Academy at night to drink and gamble. Are there any more implicated in this? If there are I'll discharge every boy from the school, but I'll know the truth."

"Hist! Hist!" called the constable, in a low whisper. "They are in the cave—I hear them. Will you never quit talking over there, and help me capture these thieves?"

"By George! Coats is right!" exclaimed Colonel Fuller. "Come on, boys! Come on!"

All hurried toward the rocks now, and joined the constable, who stood pointing toward a low, narrow opening in the ledge, close down upon the ground.

Bob, who was decidedly tender-hearted, and really felt much sympathy for the miserable position in which Joe Dana had placed himself by his own folly, turned to speak a word to him, when to his surprise he found that Joe had set the lantern down upon the grass and disappeared.

"He's lit out, and upon my word I don't blame him," thought Bob, hurrying after the rest. "If I were he I'd be ashamed to show my face around Corrina Lake for some time to come."

Meanwhile, about the mouth of the cave the debate was who should venture in first.

Captain Coats was disinclined. Neither Colonel Fuller nor General Dana—to use a common expression—seemed to "hanker after the job."

"I'll go!" cried Bob, springing forward and crawling through the opening. "Follow me, fellows! We'll soon smoke 'em out!"

"Take a pistol, Bob!" shouted his father, when all at once a loud crash was heard within the cave, then a groan, and then all was still.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

That the thoughts of Larry White, as he crept after Ben Spurr and the burglar, were of anything but a cheerful nature, may be readily believed.

Weak and wounded, alone in the gloomy cave with two desperate fellows, his position was anything but an enviable one, to say the least.

He crouched behind a projecting point in the rocky wall, and peered forward, keeping tight hold of his only defensive weapon, the stone.

Now the cave of the Talking Rock was, as Larry had already discovered, divided into two parts.

The outer chamber, the one immediately behind the rock

whose entrance was beneath the water, was connected with the other by means of the narrow passage in which Larry now stood.

The interior chamber was decidedly the largest, and at its end a pile of loose, jagged rocks was to be seen, extending upward almost to the high-arched roof overhead; while at a point near the centre were the charred remains of a fire, by the side of which Ben and the burglar stood.

They were talking in low whispers and for the moment Larry could not hear what was being said, until all at once Ben exclaimed, angrily:

"Look here, Jim Jowler, what are you trying to get at? Do you mean to cheat me out of my share?"

"Your share?" he heard the burglar answer. "What does that amount to? What have you done to entitle you to half the money, I'd like to know?"

"What have I done?" snarled Ben. "Why, you couldn't have got into the bank at all if it hadn't been for me. Didn't I get the keys out of Colonel Fuller's office, and bring them to you?"

"There, there, don't make so much talk," was the answer. "The boats with those fellows may have come up, and you know how that infernal rock gives everything away that is said inside here. Where's the spade? First of all we've got to dig up the box."

But Ben would talk, and for full ten minutes the wrangle continued, but in tones too low for Larry to make out what was said.

Had they settled it?

Apparently, for Ben moving off to one side of the rocky chamber presently returned carrying a spade.

Meanwhile the burglar had stooped down and cleared away the embers on the floor, and when Ben came back he began immediately to dig in this particular spot.

How eagerly Larry watched him!

He had taken his determination now.

The instant the money was unearthed, he meant to let fly the stone which he still held with convulsive grip, rush in and fight for the possession of the box.

They were two to one, but that he never stopped to consider. Drawing more into the shadow, he watched every movement of the spade.

"I've got it now," Larry heard Ben whisper as he bent over the hole, and drew forth a square tin box of considerable size.

No sooner did the eyes of the burglar rest upon the box than he snatched up the spade from the heap of newly-turned earth, upon which Ben had suffered it to fall, and with it dealt him a fearful blow on the head.

"That settles you!" he hissed. "Now I've got it all to myself. You little fool, did you really expect to get your share?"

Was this the "honor among thieves," of which some foolish persons like to prate?

Ben Spurr, with a deep groan, sank forward across the hole, while Jowler sprang toward the pile of loose rocks at the end of the cave.

Perhaps he had gone three steps, perhaps four, when crash came the great stone which Larry had held till now, whizzing past his head.

It failed to hit the fleeing burglar, but in stopping him it had served at least a part of Larry's purpose; and before Jim Jowler knew what was coming, Larry had dashed upon him and tried to tear the box away.

"Larry White! by all that's blue!"

"Yes, and by all that's black too! Take that—and—that! I'll take charge of this box."

"You will, will you? Then you'll take this with it!" shouted the burglar. "Take a taste of that, you fool! I'll teach you not to come to life when once you're dead. I'll choke the life out of you! I'll—Great Scott! I'm euchred now!"

There was a rush of feet at the other end of the cave. Larry, upon whose throat the fingers of the burglar had closed with fearful grip uttered a feeble cry for help.

"Give it to him, Larry! Give it to him!" he heard voices calling; then suddenly the pressure of his throat was loosed, there came a rush—a fearful crash, and—

"No, no, he's not dead! You're not dead, are you, Larry?"

Bob Fuller was bending over him now, Colonel Fuller was standing on one side, and General Dana on the other, and all about him in the dimly lighted cave crowded the students of the two schools at Oakdale.

Last and best of all his hand still clutched the box which he had fought so hard to retain.

"Here's your money, Colonel Fuller," gasped the brave boy, pushing the box toward the colonel's feet. "I said I'd never give up until I got it, and there it is."

"Three cheers for Larry White!" he heard Bob's voice shout.

And the rocky walls of the cave echoed back three times three cheers.

* * * * *

Dead! Not a bit of it!

There was nobody dead.

Larry was badly hurt, Ben Spurr lay in a state of complete unconsciousness, while Jim Jowler with his leg broken by the fall of a great mass of rock from the loose pile leading up to the exit from the cave which he had sought to gain, was a prisoner in the hands of Captain Coats, yet one and all remained very much alive.

It was Harry Lownes and his companions who had managed to find the water entrance to the cave and came dashing in, which had alarmed Jowler just at the critical moment for Larry.

The events of that memorable night put an end forever to the rivalries of Colonel Fuller and General Dana, and to those of the students of Hamden and Oakdale.

After that all was smooth sailing, all were the best of friends, and as smooth sailing, though pleasant, is by no means exciting, we may as well bring our story to an end right here and now.

Jim Jowler was taken by Captain Coats to the country jail at Downingtown, while Ben Spurr was carried to his father's home at Peterboro on the Comet, where for weeks he lay ill with a broken head.

Slade and Jowler went to the penitentiary finally, and Ben, no sooner had he recovered, than, to the great relief of every one, he ran away.

Some say he went to sea, others that he went out West—at all events he was never seen around Corrina Lake again.

Joe Dana ran away too, went as far as New York, but the general followed him and brought him back again in a half-starved condition and pretty thoroughly toned down.

Long since the boy's escapade has been forgotten, and to-day he is a man respected by all who know him, and in full charge of his father's extensive affairs.

The money stolen from the Oakdale Bank was found in the box intact.

It was a great day for Larry when the president and directors of the bank gave him a public reception in the town hall, and the select men of Oakdale in solemn counsel assembled, passed him a vote of thanks.

Then the bank officers voted Larry a reward of one thousand dollars, and Bob a gold medal, which made him feel as proud as a king.

General Dana and the officers of the Hamden Bank wanted to join in the gifts, but Colonel Fuller would not allow it; and after being town talk for a week the affair was suffered to give place to an election excitement, for true to his promise, Colonel Fuller ran Captain Coats for mayor, and managed things so well that he was elected almost without a dissenting vote.

The next year Bob left the Academy and went into business. Larry at the same time taking a clerkship in one of Colonel Fuller's mills.

The last time we were in Oakdale—it was two—no, three years ago—we noticed that the mill sign read "Fuller & White," which meant that the colonel had retired and that Bob and Larry were running the business, and we learned incidentally that Larry had married Jennie Fuller, and not Minnie Dana, after all.

The Oakdale Academy we found much enlarged and improved, and under the immediate charge of Colonel Fuller still, though, of course, the old students are scattered far and wide, but the Hamden Institute has been given up and the building sold, so, if we ever write another story about the students of Corrina Lake it must concern those of the Academy only and not the "Two Schools at Oakdale."

THE END.

Read "THE FARMER'S SON; OR, A YOUNG CLERK'S DOWNFALL," by Howard Austin, which will be the next number (137) of "Pluck and Luck."

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